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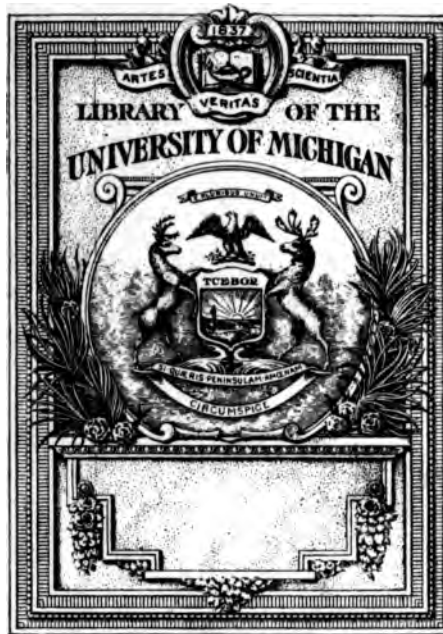
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IN THE CENTRE OF THE GREAT ROOM, JUST BENEATH THE SEVEN-BRANCHED CHANDELIER WHICH POUKED DOWN ITS DAZZLING LIGHT FULL UPON IT STOOD, SURROUNDED BY TALL PLANTS, A MARBLE STATUE.

BELLA'S BLUE-BOOK

THE STORY OF AN UGLY WOMAN

BY

MARIE CALM

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

MRS. J. W. DAVIS

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

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BELLA'S BLUE-BOOK.

CHAPTER I.

ON my fifteenth birthday my father gave me an album, beautifully bound in blue velvet with silver ornaments and a silver lock, with my monogram on the cover in silver, *A. S.* "Young girls," my father said as he gave it to me, "are always fond of writing out poetry and things of that sort, and you can use this book for that purpose."

So various crude rhymes of my own composition found a place there, and, when they were written out neatly, looked quite imposing on the smooth vellum paper, in spite of their halting feet. Very soon, however, I awoke to the consciousness that my prose was better than my verse, and so I put down in my locked album, with perfect freedom, everything I did not care to confide to any one else—my most secret thoughts and feelings.


Not that I was sentimental in the slightest degree. A Berlin girl, daughter of one of the most solid and matter-of-fact Berlin merchants—and sentimental? That would be an incongruity. But thoughts and feelings cost nothing, every one knows, and so they are current even in Berlin, and creep even into a merchant's house, especially when an only child is growing up there motherless and alone. Then confidantes like my album come in very well.

And what convenient confidantes they are! They ask no questions, they never chatter, they make no confidences of their own requiring your attention in turn; silent as the grave, they take in everything, and do not permit themselves even a glance of incredulity when one puts one's self and one's actions in too advantageous a light.

And is that what I did? Not intentionally. I tried to be quite true and impartial, but who can always be sure of having been so?

Besides, the greater part of my descriptions belong to a later period, when I could already look back upon my childhood and early youth with a clear and critical eye. Later still, I arranged them and completed them, and so this "Blue-Book" came into existence.

But, it may be asked, why "Blue-Book"? Why not "Diary" or "Album"? Because the former name suits the period better. Diaries and albums



belonged to the lyric, æsthetic period, when people poured out artificial sentiments in finely turned phrases rather than real ones, and perpetuated their friendships by dried flowers and locks of hair. Those times have gone by. Now politics are the ruling power ; I had heard of state secrets in the archives, of blue and yellow books, and so I called the beautiful blue book my "Blue-Book."

So it is "Bella's Blue-Book." Bella is my name ; that is, the diminutive in daily use. My real name is Arabella. A pretty name, isn't it ? But, for that very reason, entirely unsuitable for me. Parents ought not to give their children such uncommon, fantastic names, as, when they do it, they cannot possibly know whether their "sweet baby" will one day do honor to the name, and will grow up to be an ideal poetical embodiment of the ideal poetical title.

And now Bella, too—the beautiful ! Such a pretentious, ambitious label ! And when one sees behind it a thin, brown, black-browed girl, it makes her seem even uglier than nature, in her stepmother mood, intended her to be.

For I *am* ugly—that tells the whole story. A whole life-history lies in these few words.

It is true, the moralists are not of that opinion. They say, "Beauty is but skin deep ;" or, with the wise "Vicar of Wakefield," "Handsome is that

handsome does." But would his Sophia have attracted the noble and rich Sir William Thornhill, *alias* Burchell, if she had been humpbacked or had had a squint? No, no; the wise sayings of the moralist do not agree with what reality teaches us.

For a woman's fate, at least, depends for the most part on her outward advantages or failings. A Greek profile, with its accompaniments, betokens love, enjoyment of life, happiness; an Ethiopian or Malayan cast of countenance means snubbing, vain longing, joyless loneliness.

That is called pessimism, is it not? Very well, show me a more excellent way, and I will gladly adopt it. So far, I have never experienced anything else. For one brief moment—indeed, for a few short, blessed weeks—I thought, I hoped; but it was only a mirage, a foolish dream, which vanished only too soon. Now it is one of my indisputable, absolutely irrefutable articles of faith that an ugly woman has little happiness in life to hope for; it would require a miracle to convert me to the belief of the moralist.

Observe that I speak of happiness, not of content. The latter can be attained without beauty, perhaps even better without it than with it. For one seeks and finds contentment, generally, only when one has renounced happiness. Contentment is far removed from happiness—the latter is struggle

and victory, it knows the height of bliss and the depths of sorrow ; it is glowing sunshine and raging storm, but never the dead level of colorless monotony. And this struggle, this sunshine and storm, is what youth longs for, not the peace which follows renunciation.





CHAPTER II.

I VERY early learned the bitter lesson that there is no happiness for an ugly woman, though it was long before I really realized the fact. Children are not very good judges in such matters. They think less of how they themselves and their companions look than of what they have on. A new dress, a bright ribbon, make them beautiful, while one of Murillo's beggar boys is nothing more to them than a dirty, ragged beggar, and therefore is ugly, as a matter of course.

But I had beautiful dresses. My father was rich ; I wore muslin when others wore calico, and silk on holidays. My little companions envied me, and said : "How pretty you look to-day," and I thought no more about it, but considered myself beautiful.

Then once—I might have been eight or nine years old—I was invited to a children's ball. I had learned to dance with some other little girls, and Fräulein Idali, our teacher, had praised me ; she

said I danced lightly and gracefully. How joyfully I-anticipated that ball !

"I must have a new white dress for it," I said to my governess, Mademoiselle Désirée. "A white dress?" she cried, horrified. "*Ma pauvre petite chatte*, you would look like a fly in milk in a white dress !"

I looked at her in amazement. What did she mean? Did she compare me to a fly because my hair and eyes were black? But the rider I had seen in the circus, the other day, had had black eyes and hair, and she wore a white dress; yes, and she had looked very handsome in it. It is true her face had been very white and very red, not brown like mine—more like Mademoiselle Désirée. I looked at her attentively. "How do you make your red cheeks and white forehead, mademoiselle?" I asked, artlessly.

The Frenchwoman started up angrily.

"Make them! What do you mean?" she screamed out in a rage. "Do you fancy, because you are like a little mulatto yourself, that no one else can have a beautiful complexion by nature? You envious little nigger!"

I sat transfixed. Mulatto! Nigger!

In my geography there were colored pictures of the different races of men—the Caucasian, Malayan, Ethiopian, etc. I belonged to the Caucasian—the white race—my teacher, who gave me a lesson every

day, had told me, so I could not be a mulatto or a negro.

I got the book, and, placing myself before the glass, I compared myself with the picture. No, I was not as white as the Caucasian, but neither was I as black as the negro—I was only yellow, almost like the Mongolian. Why was that? I was not born in China. But mademoiselle did not always look so beautifully pink and white. In the morning when she got up (she slept in the same room with me) she looked quite yellow, or pale; at any rate, she was hideous. It was not till afternoon, when we went to dinner, that she looked so pretty, with her blond curls and her blue ribbons—especially when we had visitors. . . .

A few days later we were expecting guests to dinner. Mademoiselle had made her toilet early, for she had the oversight of the servants in this house without a mistress, and when we had a dinner-party she was accustomed to give the finishing touch to the table. Papa had engaged a Frenchwoman for this purpose so that I could learn French from her at the same time, and thus kill two birds with one stone. As soon as I heard her go down-stairs I hurried into the bedroom, got the key to her toilet-table out of the work-box in her commode, and found the two boxes out of which she had taken her beautiful colors when she thought I was asleep.

Yes, there they were! away back, hidden away under combs, brushes, and pomade-boxes! I opened them triumphantly—there was some pink cotton in them, and there, with the white powder, a thing set round with fine feathers. I began carefully to paint my face with it—my forehead, nose, and chin white, my cheeks red—really, it did look lovely! Then I got out a blue ribbon, such as mademoiselle wore, fastened it round my smooth hair, which I usually wore in a net, and thought myself charming.

Then the dinner-bell rang. Quite proud of myself I hurried to the dining-room, where the guests were already assembled.

"Where have you been, Bella?" asked mademoiselle with suppressed vexation—but she stopped in horror as her short-sighted eyes perceived the change in my countenance.

"Why, Bella, what have you been doing to yourself?" my father exclaimed now, while the guests looked at each other with a smile.

"I have been painting myself pink and white, the way mademoiselle does," I replied, artlessly. "She said I looked like a mulatto, and I won't be that."

A sudden shriek answered my words, the smiles of the guests changed into laughter, and my father himself set the example of a general outburst.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle," he began, at length; but mademoiselle, who had looked round in

vain for a sympathetic arm into which she might have fallen in a swoon, had disappeared.

Nor did she ever pardon me, but she went away soon after, together with her pink and white boxes. I was sent to school, and afterward my good Mrs. Tremlett came to me; and she was as brown as I was, and only betrayed her vanity by her *ponceau* ribbons, for which she had an especial passion. But that attempt to improve my complexion has remained the only one; since then I have painted over a good deal of canvas, but never again my own face.





CHAPTER III.

IF the adventure with Mademoiselle Désirée formed the first step in the development of my self-consciousness, another and later event put the finishing touch to it.

First, however, I must mention here several persons who had a share in it, and who would never forgive me if I gave them no place in my biography. These were my aunt the Geheimräthin, and her son Emile.

My aunt the Geheimräthin was my only relative in the city, and she was not even a real aunt ; she was only the cousin of my mother, as she always carefully explained—for what reason I did not discover until afterward. For the rest, she tried to make the most of her auntship in every way ; she often invited me to her house, on which occasions I generally received, to take home with me, a piece of dried-up cake which had been left over from some Christmas feast, ten years before, and which I threw away as soon as her back was turned ; she also came to see me equally often, and looked me

and my belongings all over with her inquisitive little black eyes, invariably discovering if anything about me and around me was not in perfect order. At a later period she examined critically every new garment or piece of furniture, being loud in her admiration, though generally adding, "although I, the widow of a simple official, do not understand much about such things."

For my part, I never failed to return her evil for evil; that is, I viewed her with equal curiosity. At six years of age I inquired why she had no husband; at nine, I studied the tuft of hair on the little wart on her chin, which, changing like the moon, was now a luxurious growth, and now—after an attempt at its destruction—looked quite wan and feeble. At twelve I laughed at her gloves, whose existence she tried to prolong, by washing and darning, beyond the ordinary period allotted to such articles, and which not seldom displayed her pink finger-tips; and at fifteen I laughed, in company with Mrs. Tremlett, at her adoration of her son Emile, who, like all the only sons of widowed Geheimrätinnen, was, of course, a prodigy.

The latter, my cousin (only second-cousin once removed, as his mother always carefully explained), had been brought up by his guardian and uncle, a country pastor in Thuringia. My aunt used to spend a few months with him every summer, and on

this account her son seldom came to Berlin, not even at Christmas-time ; partly on account of the long, costly journey, partly because he might have taken cold in the wintry weather ! I remember him as I saw him once, a stout, light-haired youth—awkward, like all youths, especially when they come from the country—and upon whom I, the city girl, who, according to Fräulein Idali's expression, "danced lightly and graciously," looked down with excessive condescension.

Now, however, Cousin Emile (I can't possibly say second-cousin once removed every time) had gone to the university, had already had a duel there in his first term, and had written a poem, "The Pariah," which had appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Thuringian Messenger*. His mother had read me this poem, and the sorrows of this unhappy being were portrayed in such vivid colors that I joined the delighted mother in shedding tears of emotion over it and looked on the author as a second Schiller.

So I was quite delighted when my aunt imparted to me the news that Emile would spend the Easter vacation with her. I promised myself many interesting hours from my intercourse with the young poet and duellist, and for the first time I pondered over the reason why my aunt laid so much stress on the remoteness of our relationship, and why people said it was not good for cousins to marry. Girls

of sixteen are very apt to occupy themselves with such questions.

I was particularly glad that during his stay there would be an examination at my Institute—the last at which I should be present. At this I could show him that *anch' io son' pittore*—that, although my verses remained under lock and key in my “Blue-Book,” yet that I had an understanding for poetry and for pariahs ; in short, for all heights and depths—even for young poets and duellists.

The great day came. My father, my aunt Geheimrätthin in newly washed gloves, and my cousin Emile, still stout and light-haired, but with a black and red and gold watch-chain, and an interesting scar on his left cheek, sat in the first row of spectators. Of course, I translated my Racine and Shakespeare especially for him, and when, in the literature class, I had to read a paper on “The Eleusinian Festival,” I gave a sidelong glance at him to see if he was as much overcome by my description of degraded humanity as I had been by his “Pariah.” But no—he looked quite cheerful—and I had declaimed with such pathos ! I felt rather injured, but then I overheard him complimenting my father on his “talented daughter,” and that appeased my wrath. “Men do not show their feelings as we do,” I thought.

For that evening we had a little company

invited, of which, of course, my cousin and his mamma formed a part. "He will sit by me," I thought; "we will talk about literature and science, and he will tell me how much he admires me—oh, it will be lovely!" and then, as a coming triumph, I would play on the piano the "Sonate Pathétique" of Beethoven, which I had been practising for three months. I played well—not only our guests told me so, but my teacher had said it also—I even felt it myself when I became absorbed in the tones I was producing, although they were only expressing the thoughts of others. What must he, the poet, feel when he heard me!

I made a careful toilet; I put on my newest silk dress, my gold watch and chain, which I had received on my last birthday, and as much jewellery as I could scrape together, and my jewel-case was already very well stocked. Mrs. Tremlett did not oppose me—that suited her *ponceau* ribbons!

Among the guests there was a school-friend of mine, the daughter of a teacher, a good child enough, but one who, like so many others, would never have set the river on fire. She stood there in her simple muslin dress, looking timid and awkward. And no wonder, in this elegant company! In addition, she had had the misfortune that day at the examination to forget the names of the Pharaohs. Poor Mimi, she was really to be pitied, and I felt sure that

Cousin Emile would despise her for her ignorance. So I was kinder to her than usual, and at dinner let her sit on the other side of my cousin.

But it was not my intention at all that he should devote himself to her exclusively ! It was with the greatest amazement, which soon changed into vexation, that I saw how he, after uttering a few pretty speeches about my brilliant examination, turned to his other neighbor and plunged into conversation with her—a girl who did not even know the names of the Pharaohs ! And what did they talk about ? He asked her if she had ever been to a ball ; and when she said no, he declared that she ought to go to one as soon as she could—that he was sure she would dance beautifully, and it was such a pity they could not try it together here !

I turned away in vexation, so that I need not hear any more of such stupid conversation, and I tried to put a stop to it as soon as possible with my "Sonate Pathétique," which I thundered out in the pauses. But—*horreur !*—even that was of no avail. I could see them both sitting on a divan not far from the piano, chattering away in spite of the angry glances which the mother Geheimräthin cast at her son ; I could see how he bent down to whisper something in Mimi's ear that made her smile, and how she nodded and at length answered him, holding up her fan before her face.

“For shame, the little coquette,” I thought, playing so absent-mindedly that I was displeased with myself, and improvised a sudden conclusion in the middle of the sonata. No one noticed it; they came up dutifully to thank the daughter of their host for “the pleasure they had enjoyed;” and Cousin Emile, too, approached me with a stupid compliment. But I looked up at him with eyes flashing with anger, and said, loud enough for the by-standers to hear: “You did not listen at all; probably you understand waltzes and polkas better than Beethoven.” And then I turned my back on him.

Late in the evening, however, when the guests had gone away and I was sitting in my bedroom, before my toilet-table with its draperies of airy white lace, arranging my hair for the night, my hand, which was undoing the heavy braids, dropped idly down, and I leaned back in my chair, and thought and thought.

“Why,” I said to myself, “did my cousin prefer that insignificant girl, who did not even know the Pharaohs, to me, who passed the best examination in the class; who declaimed ‘The Eleusinian Festival’ to the delight of every one, and played the ‘Sonate Pathétique’ with skill and expression?” He, a learned man, a poet, could not be so superficial as to be pleased by blue eyes and rosy cheeks!

And then I leaned forward and looked long and earnestly in the glass. And the examination which I held before myself did not prove so satisfactory as that of the morning before my teachers. No, the countenance reflected back from the mirror by the candles on either side was not beautiful. It reminded me of Mademoiselle Désirée's mulatto—the skin had not grown much whiter, though it was so transparent that the blue veins showed through it. Add to this the low forehead, from which I found it hard to brush back the thick black hair; the unusually large black eyes, with the black brows almost meeting, and the peculiar, gloomy expression, which looked almost sinister, in the thin, small face; the nose, which conformed to no rule of beauty; the large mouth, which only the white teeth made tolerable—certainly, all this could not lay claim to any very favorable verdict. And now the figure—small and so slender that I might have been supposed to be only thirteen instead of sixteen, neck and arms so thin that even my dress-maker, who was always ready to declare every good customer a Venus, had advised me to wear a fichu and undersleeves of tulle with my silk dress! No, no; I could not deceive myself—I was ugly!

Now there was Mimi, tall, slender, round, with a pink and white face framed in wavy golden hair. When Emile spoke to her and a smile parted her

rosy lips, she reminded me of an opening rosebud. Oh, how foolish I had been to invite her ! or, rather, how foolish I had been to imagine that I, who was so ugly, could please a poet, since a poet loves the beautiful.

I pitilessly tore apart my thick black braids and put out the candles. I would not look at my ugly face any more. I threw myself on my bed—my dainty white “young lady’s bed,” as Mrs. Tremlett called it—and shed a few bitter, scalding tears. For I began to have some understanding of what I should have to endure in my life ; I began to comprehend, what I have since then clearly recognized, that for a woman to be ugly means to be neglected, to be thrust into the background, and to lead a joyless, loveless existence.

Was I not already experiencing this ? Who loved me as I longed to be loved ? My father ? He was very kind to me, fulfilled every wish of mine, but I saw very little of him, only at dinner-time, and sometimes in the evenings when he did not go to his club. Then I used to play something to him, while he leaned back in the great arm-chair covered with the panther-skin and read his newspaper ; and when I had finished, that is, when the noise no longer disturbed him, he would look up from his paper, push up his gold spectacles, and nod to me : “Very well, Bella, very well played. Only

practise well, for such a talent is very useful in society."

Especially when one has nothing else to offer, I now said to myself. And then it came into my head to count how often papa had kissed me. Always on my birthday—I was always glad of that; then when I was confirmed—I think that was all. Really, I could count up with very little trouble exactly how many kisses I had received from him—I, an only child, from her father! No, he did not love me as I wanted to be loved.

And Mrs. Tremlett? Oh, she was a very good woman, and was fond of me—really very fond of me. But she was not tender, and I did not expect her to be. In fact, when she first came to me it gave me an unpleasant feeling when she kissed me regularly morning and evening; the caresses that I thought so much of seemed to me too precious for daily use; nay, they were almost desecrated by her business-like manner. So, gradually, these signs of tenderness between us ceased. Moreover, she was not soft by nature. I should never have thought of going to her with a trouble such as I was now suffering from. She would have looked at me in amazement, would have shaken her long brown curls, would have said, "Nonsense, child!" and gone calmly on working at her point-lace frame.

No, no one loved me as I wanted to be loved,

with all the warmth of an affectionate heart. Only one person had ever done that — my mother. "Mother!" I suddenly cried out aloud in the dark, silent night; and for the first time in my life I cried for her whom I had scarcely known.

Ah, my mother! I had missed her my whole life long. For her the dark little girl would have been as beautiful as an angel, she would have kissed the low brown forehead with as much tenderness as if it had been as white as a lily. In the sunshine of her love I should have grown up merry and happy, unaffected by the slights which had intimidated the child—on her warm heart I should myself have become warm and soft and tender.

I tried to recall the face of my mother, whom I had never consciously beheld; but I only saw before me the stiff picture that hung in my father's room. A small face, framed in broad black braids—large, dark eyes that looked sadly down upon me. A pale, worn face, so it seemed to me now. Before, I had always been most attracted by the beautiful lace collar, the pattern of which was displayed so clearly on the dark satin of her dress, and the long lace ruffles which fell about her delicate, folded hands.

If any memory of her mother had lingered in the heart of the four-years' child, this picture would have effaced it.

But, notwithstanding, something of her still re-

mained in my memory—her voice. When I shut my eyes tight and listened with all my might, I could hear a low, soft voice singing :

“ Sleep, baby, sleep !
The large stars are the sheep ;
The small stars are the lambs, I guess,
And the fair, pale moon is the shepherdess.
Sleep, baby, sleep ! ”

And then I can see a form bending over a little crib, in which a little child is lying. I can feel how she takes the baby's hands and how she kisses them. That kiss moves me to the depths of my heart, and my tears flow more gently. Oh, mother, mother ! No one but you ever taught me to pray, no one ever tried to make me good. And so I have grown up to be what I am. Perhaps, if you had lived, I should have been good, and then I should have been happy.





IT WAS ON THE OCCASION OF MY FIRST CASINO BALL.

p. 27.





CHAPTER IV.

THEN there came a time when these impressions faded, when the pleasures of youth and the capacity for enjoyment carried me beyond the bitter experiences of childhood. And, besides, what face is there to which the charm of eighteen years does not lend some beauty? I shall never forget my delighted surprise when I made this discovery.

It was on the occasion of my first casino ball. I dressed for it, or, rather, suffered myself to be dressed. Mrs. Tremlett had lighted the candles on both sides of my Psyche glass; and while she, on her knees before me, arranged the puffs and flounces of my pale blue *crêpe* dress, and Louise, my maid, put the dark red roses in my hair, they both asked, from time to time, if that was right. I always replied in the affirmative, though without looking up from the volume of "Problematic Characters" which I was devouring. For, though my good Tremlett was so strict with regard to my English reading that she absolutely forbade Shakespeare and Byron (which, of course, I was all the more eager to read in secret), I was allowed perfect freedom in German and

French literature. But just as I was in the middle of a very tender scene between Oswald Stein and the charming Melitta—regarding the moral of which I had very confused perceptions—the little daughter of the coachman came in to say that the carriage was at the door. Vexed at the interruption I threw the book down, and was just putting on my white burnous when the child, clapping her hands, cried out, "Oh, how beautiful the Fräulein is!"

Oh, a woman's vanity! I might have known that the child meant my dress only, but the exclamation caused me to look up, and there—yes, I will confess that the stern, critical glance that I was accustomed to cast into the mirror was a little softened. Like *Olivia* in "Twelfth Night," I made an "inventory of my good parts," and the result was somewhat less discouraging than it had been two years before.

To be sure, when I stood in the well-lighted ball-room and compared myself, not with my earlier unadorned self, but with the charming creatures, adorned by nature, who surrounded me, I sank back into my old condition of hopeless discouragement. And even if I did dance not less than others, if my partners poured their usual honeyed words into my ear, and their mothers complimented me on my "tasteful toilet, which was wonderfully becoming" to me, I did not remain for a moment in doubt that the attentions of the gentlemen, and all the

mothers' sweetness, were due not to the young girl but to the rich heiress.

Thus two years passed. Unlike most girls, of whom it is said that they have many admirers but few lovers, and among them still fewer who aspire to be husbands—I had more of the latter than the former. But I had made up my mind firmly on one point, that I would not marry a poor man who only wanted me for my money.

Then—I was just twenty—I lost my father, suddenly, and in a dreadful manner. He had been to New York on business, and he never came back. No one can have forgotten about the great steamer “*Libelle*” that went down on the English coast. It was in November when we learned the frightful news in the papers. Only a few of the passengers were saved ; if my father had been among them he would have telegraphed to us long before. We—Mrs. Tremlett and I—set off early in the morning of the following day for England. It was as we had feared—he had found his grave beneath the ocean.

I mourned for him truly and deeply, and yet I reproached myself for not being more utterly cast down. He had been a kind father to me, but he was not my counsellor and my friend. But as a kind father he had taken care of my future ; he had appointed an old business friend of his my guardian, and had left me his great fortune on the condi-

tion that on my marrying it should be secured to me.

The following years I passed with my faithful Tremlett in foreign lands. We travelled through France, Italy, Spain, even going so far as Egypt, and my wealth enabled us to engage capable guides, whose knowledge and experience were of great value to us on these journeys. We spent a long time in England also, and it was there that I first found out how much a rich, independent woman can accomplish. The freer position of an Englishwoman in society, her lively interest in all that concerns her country, her general activity, impressed me and aroused in me the wish to do likewise.

"I will be the German rival of the Baroness Burdett Coutts," I said to my good Tremlett. "As she has remained single for fear that men care more for her wealth than for herself, and now finds her happiness in doing good, so I will remain alone and be charitable with the wealth that has been given to me."

Mrs. Tremlett shook her long curls.

"It is easy to talk like that when one is twenty," she said, "but afterward—I did not marry, either, till my thirtieth year; but then Captain Tremlett came and asked me to marry him, and I could not refuse. You, Bella, who are so impressionable, will not wait so long as that."

After an absence of three years we went back home—to the great, empty house which had been without a master for so long. We settled ourselves down according to our own wishes and tastes. The large garden was changed into an “English park,” the library was enlarged, and all the rooms were adorned with the valuable pictures and objects of art which we had brought back from our travels. “Now we are settled quite happily in our old maids’ home,” said Mrs. Tremlett, comfortably placing her long, narrow feet on the shining brass fender which surrounded the English fireplace in our drawing-room.

“Yes, and now I am going to begin to do good,” said I, somewhat as I might have said I would begin a piece of embroidery or a romance.

“To-day, or not before to-morrow?” was Mrs. Tremlett’s ironical question.

But her incredulity vexed me. “To-morrow,” I replied, very decidedly. “To-morrow we will begin to visit the benevolent institutions of our city.”

And so we did. For a week we made the round of all the orphan asylums, soup-kitchens, hospitals, blind asylums, kindergartens, for the poor, etc., in Berlin. Every evening I came home tired and depressed. I had put my offering in every box, had made myself a member of every society, and my library was enriched by an enormous mass of

statutes, reports, tracts, and so forth. For the rest, I found it very unpleasant to breathe in the close, stifling air of the sick-rooms and school-rooms, to shake the children by their certainly rather dubious-looking hands, and to taste the food in the soup-kitchens, which was, no doubt, very good, but was not at all to my somewhat fastidious taste. Of course, I did all this with the heroism of a martyr. Mrs. Tremlett stood by, looking on with a smile ; but when she asked me at length what I was going to undertake, I declared to her that I should have to give up philanthropy, everything was already provided for ; and, besides, I could see that I was not fitted for it. I should restrict myself to subscribing to every institution. And that was the end of my philanthropic career.

And what now ?

I interested myself in art. That, I was sure, was not artificial like the philanthropic craze. Music had long been to me a dear friend, and now I would devote myself to it. An Erard piano, the best teachers for theory and practice—all these were soon found. One of the beautiful reception-rooms was fitted up for this purpose ; no carpet, the busts of the great composers in marble, their works in magnificent bindings. I practised four or five hours every day, to the despair of poor Mrs. Tremlett, who was about as musical as Zokko, my handsome

Newfoundland dog, whose love for me was put to a severe test by my behavior.

Then Rubinstein came to Berlin. I heard him, and—closed my piano. Why should I torment myself? I could never come anywhere near him, and anything short of that did not seem worth while. Compose! That was an absurdity,—a few insignificant songs, an impromptu that was very impromptu. I had too good taste to take any pleasure in it.

So there was nothing to be done with music either. I might enjoy it and cultivate it, like all *dilettanti* (who do not usually inspire any great *diletto* in their audience), but I could not make it the aim of my existence.

But, perhaps, painting might offer me a better field. One's own productions were not of so much importance, the study of art in itself was very interesting. I had wandered through all the temples of art in the countries I had visited, I had read and heard much of art—so that was already a step in the right direction.

I visited the magnificent collections in the city, making the acquaintance thereby of various painters and sculptors, and soon gathered about me a circle of artists. I liked to penetrate to their studios, to watch their work, to follow a creation from its first conception through all the stages of enthusiasm and

encouragement, through all the changes undergone by the original idea till it stood before me embodied in form or color. They were pleasant hours that I passed thus.

But the passion for creating which lies dormant in every human being soon awoke and gave me no peace. I had always been fond of drawing and painting—perhaps the Muse of Painting would be more favorable to me than Euterpe. So I fitted up for myself a splendid *atelier*—with north lights, models, statues, and everything in the most correct fashion; I took lessons again of the best teachers, used up a great many yards of canvas, and lavished a great deal of money on artistic frames—but I was not an artist. My friends, it is true, encouraged me, my strict teacher even praised my feeling for color and thought that I had a decided talent for *genre*; but I am not enthusiastic over cabbages, either in the original or as copies, and I love flowers chiefly for their perfume—so I would not cultivate *genre*.

And then my view of the dark side of this profession! The broken-down geniuses who thronged about me, the rich "Mæcenæ," and begged for subsidies; the worthless trash which they offered to sell me for veritable gems—Madonnas and landscapes and beggar boys—with which I hung the walls of my attics; and the thin, haggard faces, with their "picturesque" frowzy hair and beards; their

shabby velvet coats, with their scanty and dirty linen—I knew very well these were only the excrescences of art, but they disgusted me with art itself.

So it happened that—well, yes, a biography must speak the truth, and my “Blue-Book” will be silent as the grave—my interest in art gradually centred in one of its worshippers, a grave, middle-aged man, who never spoke a word of flattery, who in the midst of the eager pursuit of success and riches followed his ideal calmly and undisturbed.

I had come to know him through one of his pictures—a rocky cliff in the surf, surrounded by sea-gulls; beside it, the broken remains of a ship—boards, spars, and among them a little basket-cradle fastened to the cliff by invisible ropes. The water had filled the cradle, and a bright fish was swimming about in it. The picture may be remembered, perhaps, in the *Salon* of 187—. The critics found a great deal of fault with the technique, but I was quite carried away with the idea. I wished to know the artist, but he would not come to be introduced to me, so I had to go to him. And when I began to see him often, I thought it better to see him no more.

But if I could not see him, I would not see any one else. I dismissed my teacher and closed my studio. She is capricious, like all women, they said; perhaps they were right. But why are we capri-

cious? Because we are discontented. Happiness demands either the satisfying of the heart through love, or of the intellect through a career. The satisfying of the heart is only given to a few, or only for a short time; the satisfying of the intellect, the devotion of all the powers to one object, is almost never the lot of a woman. For that reason so many of them are discontented and capricious.

But I could not live alone. Several artists, who were really worthy of my esteem, remained faithful to me; in addition, there came a few literary men, men of science—in short, I gathered around me a new and not less interesting court, as the centre of which I felt quite in my element. I received these gentlemen at my house, and kept on a friendly footing with them, with the matronly self-possession which my independent position lent me, as well as my resolve never to marry—a resolve of which I made no secret. Mrs. Grundy, it is true, shook her head now and then, and whispered about that Fräulein Sarneck (that is my name; pardon me for not having mentioned it before) was very strong-minded, that she rode with a man's boldness, walked out only accompanied by a dog, and associated more with men than with women. But what did I care for Mrs. Grundy? For me only such persons existed as were gifted with reason and intellect, and Mrs. Grundy was not of that order.



CHAPTER V.

AMONG the young men who visited at my house there was a literary man named Ranzoff—Dr. Ranzoff, he was called ; but the “Dr.” was not of any great value, having been brought from the other side of the ocean. Ranzoff had been a merchant who had failed and had tried his fortune in America, with little success. He had then taken up literature, had published “Transatlantic Sketches,” which had not made him rich, it is true, but had received the recognition of the doctor’s title from an American university, and had also attracted some attention at home. So he had returned to Germany with his “Transatlantic Sketches” and a collection of American coins, which he displayed to everybody—perhaps, as I could not help thinking, to cover up his lack of the current coin of his country. At any rate, he seemed to succeed better as a journalist than as a merchant. His name was to be found in all the most widely circulated papers (easily recognizable, even in those that did not publish the names of the staff, by his “Rzff.”), and during the

winter he had come out as a lecturer on American life, German industries, French politics, and so on.

I had become acquainted with him, and had invited him to my house. During the season I had not paid much attention to him, but now it was summer, balls and parties had come to an end, every one was going travelling, and I, who had preferred to remain at home after having made a visit in spring to my estate, Helmstedt, in Silesia, now began to find it dull. Under these circumstances the witty journalist, who was very unconventional and did not stand on ceremony, was a welcome companion. It is true, I liked him rather less the more I saw of him, and his excessive vanity made him ridiculous, but still I found him entertaining.

He was writing humorous sketches just then for the *Berlin Gazette*, in which he treated society and social questions with pungent satire. They amused me, and I had asked him to read them to me in manuscript.

We were sitting one day on the great balcony which overlooked the park, and which was made into a sort of bower by tall exotic plants. I was leaning back in a low American rocking-chair, my feet resting on Zokko, who lay idly stretched out before me, and out of whose long, shining black hair only the silver buckles of my morocco slippers were visible.

I was a little proud, perhaps, of these shoes and the feet inside of them. They were one of the few "good parts" which I possessed. I was convinced that my shoemaker was my most sincere admirer, and I was always amused at the imposing air with which he called out to his attendant spirits, "No. 2!"

It was oppressively warm, for the sun was lying on the glass roof of the balcony and no cooling breeze stirred the glixinias which hung down from it. Dr. Ranzoff, with his *pince-nez* on his nose, his manuscript in his hand, wiped his forehead now and then, or struck at the mosquitoes which hummed about him, with his musk-scented pocket-handkerchief. By the way, I have always noticed that men who have worked their way up from a low station generally use musk or patchouli—ordinary perfumes which I cannot endure.

The sketch which he read to me contained the description of a ball given by a Geheimrätthin, with five daughters, in straitened circumstances. It was very entertaining, but the Geheimrätthin reminded me of my aunt, who was at present with her brother-in-law in Thuringia, and whose last letter I had not yet answered, notwithstanding it contained the important announcement that her son had become an assessor—pardon, a Kreis-Gerichts-Assessor! Emile, my stout, light-haired cousin, an official with a good salary—the first step toward

Geheimrath. How proud his mother would be, and how she would renew her efforts to unite us two—her two darlings! Poor aunt! It was well she had only one son to marry off, and not five daughters, like Dr. Ranzoff's Geheimrätthin——

At this point my thoughts happily returned to the reader, and I looked up at him with the firm resolve to listen attentively. But it was not to be! A wretched little mosquito which was circling round his forehead attracted my attention from the reading—it was really too interesting to watch it. Now it had found a soft spot, where it put its sting. He struck at it, and the mosquito flew away, but it had left its poison behind—yes, the place got red, then it swelled up—he rubbed it a little—the swelling increased.

It was curious why the mosquito should have selected that forehead for its sting. A hard, square forehead, thickly sown with freckles; the bite shone out from among them like a little red mound. Should I offer him some ammonia? It would have been an act of humanity, but——

“What do you think of the ending, Fräulein Bella? Is it not piquant—original?”

I had not heard it, did not even know that he had reached the end, as he had kept putting the leaf he had read behind the others. By the way, this is a bad habit, by which the listener is deprived of

the pleasure of seeing the manuscript growing thinner and thinner, and at last seeing the final leaf appear, on which he can again concentrate his scattered thoughts.

I should certainly have acknowledged my inattention and offered the ammonia as a soothing balm in return for it, if he had allowed me to speak. But, without waiting for my answer, he continued to tell me of the unusual success of these sketches, which he proposed to publish afterward in book-form.

"I have only to get a title for it," he concluded. "So much depends upon the title. The title sells a book or kills it. It is hard to find one for this book. I had thought of the 'Mocking Chair,' but the game is not very well known here, and, besides, the title ought not to betray the contents. It ought to be something general and yet attractive——"

"What do you say to 'Mosquito Bites'?" I asked, rather maliciously.

"Mosquito Bites?" He sprang up from his seat with delight. "Upon my word, I think it is just the thing. It is piquant, and yet not venomous." (Here he rubbed his forehead vigorously.) "It is new, too—'Mosquito Bites'! Really, I am very much obliged to you for the idea, Fräulein Bella."

The little mound on his forehead was greatly swollen. "Shall I not give you a little ammonia for it?" I inquired.

"For the idea!"

"No, for the mosquito bite—the one on your forehead."

He looked at me through his glass with a long glance, half astonished, half embarrassed. It may have struck him how I happened to think of the title. At length, however, he settled the matter in his own favor (it is surprising what skill some men have in making everything flattering to themselves), and said, as he kissed my hand: "Your heart is as large as your brain, though you try so hard to cover up your goodness. Your intellect finds a title for my book—in return, I will dedicate it to you, if you will permit it—and your kind heart feels for the slight injury which an impertinent insect has inflicted upon me. I thank you, Fräulein Bella."

"Pray, don't mention it," I said, in my coolest tone; but, in the mean time, I had taken the dainty *flacon* out of the silver *étui* which I always carried about me for such purposes, and offered it to him.

"Thanks, again. But might I hope that you, with your own charming hands, would——"

I had just given my rocking-chair a vigorous push, but I stopped short, and my foot struck poor Zokko so violently that the poor creature started up with a growl.

I did the same (the growling, to be sure, was

only mental), and fancied myself displaying the air and manner of an insulted queen, as I said, "Sir, you are impertinent."

It is a pity that we cannot always have a mirror at hand when we put on an imposing air. Then I should have seen at this moment that a short, slight figure like mine, with the best will in the world, could not assume queenly dignity, and that the attempt only made me ridiculous.

The countenance of my guest served me as a mirror on this occasion. I perceived that, instead of being crushed, he looked at me with a smile—without his eye-glass, which he had in his hand, so I could study his pale-blue eyes to my heart's content—and as I remained standing before him with a frowning brow, he said, indifferently: "You see, Fräulein Bella, that is the result of trying to pose as a matron when one is only twenty."

"Four-and-twenty, if you please."

"Indeed! Excuse my mistake—I should rather have said eighteen."

I sat down again. He was right—that was the result. The easy intercourse which I had allowed my acquaintance, as if I had been an elderly lady, sometimes made them forget to whom they were speaking. I felt that I had made myself ridiculous, and so I did the only thing that was left to me to do—I laughed.

Dr. Ranzoff sat down again in the little bamboo chair, that was far too low for his long, thin figure.

Then he said, as calmly and indifferently as if he were resuming a commonplace conversation which had just been interrupted, "I will tell you something, Fräulein Bella. You declare you will never marry, and yet marriage is the only thing for you. You need some one whom you can love and pet and torment; not your Zokko, and not the whole army of your admirers or friends, but one alone, a man who understands you, who is your equal in intellect, who loves you."

"Really?" I continued calmly rocking. "You are very kind, doctor, to interest yourself in my affairs. Perhaps you have already succeeded in discovering this paragon."

"Quite right. I am the man."

Now it would really have been warrantable for me to start up and cry, "Impertinent!" But I did not do it; once was enough for me. I only leaned back in my rocking-chair and looked calmly at my *vis-à-vis*.

So this was the man I ought to marry? And what had he to offer me? Fame? A journalist, a penny-a-liner! Intellect? Yes, as much as his vanity left room for. Outward advantages (for my own lack of such did not make me less critical of others)? A tall, awkward figure, thin light hair

artificially curled, a red face (no doubt I am quite wrong, from a hygienic point of view, but I cannot endure red cheeks in a man), and, add to this, the mosquito bite that made a red and shiny spot on his forehead—it was too absurd !

I suddenly felt myself mistress of the situation, and with the greatest coolness, as if I were discussing some theoretical problem, I said : “What reasons can you give me in support of your opinion ?”

The words, perhaps, did not sound repellent, but the tone was so cool, and my manner was so distant, that he looked at me doubtfully and replied, rather hesitatingly : “I have already told you that we suit each other. Really, the more I think of it, the more resemblance I find. You are intellectual—well, people say that I am, too ; you like truth and frankness—it is my chief characteristic. You prize mental advantages more than outward beauty ; I——”

“Also would content myself with an ugly wife,” I finished for him, as he stopped in the middle of his sentence. I smiled as I said it, but I flushed, and expected him to contradict me.

“No, I was not going to say that,” he cried. “But, as I have told you that frankness is one of my chief characteristics, I will confess that I am too vain to wish to serve as a foil to too great beauty. That is straightforward, is it not ?”

Yes, it was straightforward enough ; more frank than wise, in fact. Oh, these men ! how short-sighted they are ! Because I knew, myself, that I was not beautiful, he thought he could tell me of it to my face with impunity ! But he was mistaken. I did not recognize his right to do this—he who at this very moment looked to me like a scarecrow. No, the man who loved me must not find me ugly—love is blind, or should be.

So I felt injured ; but as I would not show it I said, with the greatest indifference : “ Very well. I will return your frankness by being frank in my turn. You think we are suited to each other ; I, on the contrary, think— Why, Zokko, how can you snap at the flies so furiously ! They are not worth it. They are low, common creatures that flutter around the great ; we let them alone, Zokko, and do not trouble ourselves about them.”

“ Fräulein Bella ! ” he interrupted me, impetuously.

“ Excuse my digression, Herr Doctor. I was only going to say that I think we do not suit each other at all, and that you make a great mistake when you fancy that *you* could overcome my disinclination to marriage.”

His red face gradually grew a shade redder, and he took his eye-glasses from his eyes, as if they had played him false. But no, the little person opposite

him was really perfectly grave and cool, and evidently meant what she said. He could no longer doubt it, and he inquired, in an injured tone: "Is that all you have to say?"

"On this subject—certainly."

"Then I must bid you good-by."

"Must you? I am sure you will think better of it. It would be a pity if I were not to hear the rest of 'Mosquito Bites.'"

He deigned no reply (I grant that I did not deserve any), gathered up his papers, and bowed, with a look—I was startled by it. For the first time I discovered how those pale-blue eyes could hate.





CHAPTER VI.

AUTUMN had come round again. For Mrs. Tremlett's sake I had been spending a few weeks at the sea-side. She had found it dull at home, and in that I agreed with her. Berlin in August is detestable. You can drive down the whole of Friedrich Strasse without meeting a soul. If you stop at a shop, half a dozen idle shopmen rush out at you, and in the Thiergarten the crows go to walk. Dr. Ranzoff came no more, and he had helped to while away the morning hours—it was unendurable! So Mrs. Tremlett proposed to go to the sea-shore. Norderney? Ostend? For, like a good Englishwoman, she scorned the places on the Baltic. I did not care where I went. I found it a relief that some one should decide for me.

So here I sat on the beach at Ostend, and asked myself what the difference was between looking out on the sea from the beach or looking out on the park from the balcony. For the first week or two the change was pleasant enough, but afterward—it was not a change. If there would only be a storm,

or a high tide, for once ; but the sea was glassy smooth. I wondered if it did not get tired of its own monotonous murmur and ripple.

But there were people here, plenty of them. Among them were a few, now and then, who had emancipated themselves from the dead level of the commonplace. To be sure, it was, for the most part, in a ridiculous fashion, for the really exceptional men are not labelled.

There was a southern woman—dark, eager, passionate. We called her Juliet, and we tried to find a Romeo for her. Then there was a stout little gentleman with piercing black eyes, whose growth of hair had left his head bare and concentrated itself on the lower part of his face. His better-half always walked a step or two behind him—a pale, thin woman whom he ordered about with a short turn of his head or a word hissed out at her. We called him the “Pacha.” Besides these there was a “Fan-palm”—a tall, thin, dried-up Englishwoman who never appeared without an enormous fan ; a “Queen of Golconda”—a stout woman, loaded down with jewels ; a “King of Dogs”—a young man who was always followed by two splendid hounds ; and various other queer figures.

“You had better take care, Bella, that you don't call these people sometimes by the names you have fastened on them,” said Mrs. Tremlett, warningly.

The 'Queen of Golconda' has already been making attempts to get acquainted—she sits almost directly opposite us at the table now."

"If she sat next to me, I would not speak a word to her. I am only trying to amuse myself with these people, since, unfortunately, there is no one to interest me."

"Yes, unfortunately," sighed my good Tremlett. "But I am afraid the fault is yours as much as theirs."

And she shook her long curls.

I might have opened her eyes with regard to my supposed indifference, for one man did interest me a little—the "King of Dogs." I had been attracted first by the dogs—beautiful, dainty greyhounds that laid their small, deer-like heads on his knee and jumped over his outstretched arm. Then I noticed how high the dogs had to spring to reach his arm, how tall their master was, how long he could hold his arm stretched out, and how his arm harmonized with the rest of his figure; and when he bent back his head as the graceful animals jumped about him, I could not but admire that head, with the shining brown hair, with the bold glance and the energetic mouth. It is true that when I saw his features, once, closer, I perceived a languid, wearied expression in them.

And how he could swim! He generally waited

for low tide, and then jumped from the highest part of the plank down into the water, so it splashed high up about him. I envied him this accomplishment; it must be a rare pleasure to so rule a foreign element! I wondered if he rode well. No doubt. It was a pity I had not brought my Lightning with me, I thought; and then I laughed at myself, and asked myself what my horse had to do with the "King of Dogs"—what he was to me, anyway? I admired his swimming—very well, I could enjoy that pleasure every day.

But in this, too, I was mistaken. One morning he was missing, and—I saw him no more. The "King of Dogs" had departed.

Others appeared in the brilliant kaleidoscope of watering-place life. I glanced at them, and forgot them as soon as they had passed. At length we, too, departed, and then I found myself sitting again on my balcony instead of on the beach, before me the park in its autumn dress, on the other side the Berlin streets, which were again noisy and crowded. Was it worth while to go away, and come back only for this?



CHAPTER VII.

“HERR DR. RANZOFF!”

I was standing in my library before a new physical instrument containing a barometer, thermometer, and hygrometer, and considering whether the low level of the water-measure was the cause of the low condition of my spirits. For the time of the autumnal equinox is always the most trying part of the year. During the spring storms I say to myself, “Spring is coming with a rush;” but the autumn storms are only a forerunner of winter, and I hate cold and snow and ice!

It was strange that the name which my old Thomas announced from the door of the library acted on my spirits precisely as a ray of sunlight would have acted on the thermometer. They rose perceptibly, and yet Dr. Ranzoff was very far from being a sunbeam to me. But I had not seen him since his unlucky wooing, and I was curious to know what brought him here now, and how he would conduct himself. Besides, a suitor, even a

rejected one, is more interesting to most women than the majority of ordinary men.

My reception of him, which was not unfriendly, seemed to encourage him, for his face, which at first wore a ceremonious gravity, brightened, and his deep bow lost something of its stiffness with the searching glance which he cast upon me through his eye-glass.

He held a neatly bound book in his hand, which he smilingly gave to me.

"The 'Mosquito Bites'—your title, gracious Fräulein. You remember, I asked your consent at the time to dedicate it to you. But perhaps you do not remember——"

"Oh, yes, you are very kind!" It was not the first dedication which had fallen to my lot. During my musical craze I had had various dances, pot-pourris, and reveries dedicated to me. The first time, I had bought half the edition; the second time, a quarter had sufficed, and so on. So that when I arrived at books my ardor was already quenched—a dozen copies were sufficient for my tickled vanity. I wondered whether Dr. Ranzoff would require more than that. I opened the book. It was really very elegant, very tasteful. The cover of gray-green satin was adorned with golden arabesques through which the little, golden mosquitoes were flying about. Then followed the

title-page, with the dedication: "Fräulein Arabella Sarneck. With the highest esteem of the author."

The author! It was well he had put that, instead of his own name. I should not have liked to see his name coupled with mine in print. Even as it was, I was not very much pleased. I thanked him rather coldly for his gift.

He bowed without speaking, and sat down on a chair opposite me, still in silence. Good heavens! was he going to play the sentimental lover? That would be disagreeable.

As I could not think of anything else to say, I asked him what he had been doing since I last saw him.

"Working, working!" he replied, with a touch of languor in his tone and glance, as if he were still weary from his exertions. "And yet, work was the best thing that I could have. It is the only means by which we can drive away certain—" he cleared his throat slightly— "painful memories. Even that cannot *cure* them——"

It was unendurable! Here he was beginning again! And how absurd he looked, with that martyr-like air, which by no means suited his pink cheeks and his carefully curled light hair! I studiously examined the embroidered monogram on my handkerchief to avoid seeing his face.

"Pardon me, Fräulein Bella," he continued, as I did not speak, and playing nervously with his gold eye-glass—"pardon me for being so egotistical as to refer to our last conversation. But a man so gladly believes what he wishes, and it is so easy to deceive one's self——"

Absolutely, he did not consider it possible that I could have declined his addresses seriously and in my right mind. Oh, vanity of man! It is greater than that of woman!

"Do you mean that last remark for me?" I inquired, raising my eyes from my monogram, and looking calmly and firmly at him.

"Well, it might be possible——" he stammered.

A feeling of disdain arose within me, a scornful remark was on my lips; but I remembered that in our former conversation I had been very rude to him, and I would not sin in that way again.

"Dr. Ranzoff," I said, gravely, "I think many people deceive themselves; but I, who have grown up almost alone—having brought myself up, in fact—hope I know my own mind tolerably well. At all events, with regard to this question," I added, quickly, as I perceived that he was about to interrupt me.

He turned quite pale, and then I had that feeling to which no woman who has rejected a suitor is a stranger, though he may be ever so indifferent to

her—a feeling of compassion—and I uttered words which never would have passed my lips except for this emotion, the consequences of which I little dreamed of at that time. Oh, if I had only known what use he would make of them! But I could not know it, and so I said, warmly, almost cordially :

“ My dear friend, I am afraid I was unkind when you spoke on this subject to me before—that is, unkind in the manner of my reply, for I have nothing to change in the substance. I should have reminded you of what I have so often said to you and to all my acquaintances, that I shall never marry; I should have explained to you that this is not a passing whim, but a well-considered resolution in which no one—you understand, no one—even though he were my best friend, can ever shake me. Are you convinced now ? ”

He bent over my hand and kissed it. Then he said, in a low tone, as if struggling with his feelings :

“ I will try to submit to your verdict, hard though it is for me. I must try to banish the sweet dream, lest I should lose at the same time the grateful reality, the kind friend and clever adviser. May I hope that these will remain to me ? ”

I assured him of it, and he took his departure. I looked after him thoughtfully. This last tirade,

so different from his usual manner, ought to have convinced me that he was only playing a game, but my vanity saw in it only the proof that his affection for me had been stronger than I thought. Oh, how severely I have suffered for this mistake.





BOOK SECOND.

SHE AND HE.



CHAPTER VIII.

I HAD begun my receptions again in the evenings. All my acquaintances were notified that Fräulein Sarneck was at home every Thursday evening from eight o'clock, when she would receive her friends. Even Dr. Ranzoff had received an invitation—thanks to his last visit and the dedication of “Mosquito Bites.” It would have attracted attention if he had appeared at my house no more.

He wrote to thank me, and to beg my permission to bring a friend with him. Many other people did the same thing, and, of course, no one was refused. Where hundreds are going in and out, one or two more can make but little difference. So, the day before my first reception, I found quite a pile of visiting-cards that had been left while I was out; for I found these ceremonious calls horribly tiresome, so I generally took my ride at the time when they were to be expected. I read the names indifferently, some with and some without handles—as the English say—but I knew none of them.

At length I stood in the middle of the comforta-

bly warmed and lighted salon, awaiting my guests. They were really beautiful rooms—the large salon, or the Cinderella Room, as it was called, from the frescos on the walls representing the story of our favorite heroine of the fairy tale ; the dining-room, in oak and gold, artistically carved, with a ceiling and a buffet which were the delight of all connoisseurs ; the music-room, unchanged since the close of my musical career ; the picture-gallery, with artificial light from above and an admirable collection of modern masters ; and, finally, the little octagon boudoir, a cosey little place, furnished with maize-colored satin and black velvet, with a Smyrna carpet which had been made on purpose for it in the same colors. Connected with this room was a charming conservatory which filled up the left wing, while the right one contained a large ball-room which was seldom used. All these rooms were devoted to visitors ; our private rooms were on the second floor.

Quite satisfied, I walked through the brilliant rooms while awaiting my guests, with my lady-in-waiting, the excellent Mrs. Tremlett, who still wore her brown curls and her *ponceau* ribbons. And they all came, every one ; the artists, who had accused me of caprice ; the scientific men, who had called me a blue-stockings ; the aristocrats, who had looked down on me who belonged to the middle-class ; the officials, who accused me, the merchant's

daughter, of being purse-proud—they all appeared. And the old Geheimrathinnen came, although they shrieked at me as strong-minded ; and their daughters came, although they scorned me for associating more with men than with women ; and each one rejoiced inwardly because the masculine element outweighed the feminine, and, if there was dancing, relieved them of the danger *de parer les parois*. Oh, I knew my friends very well—I could see through them all ; but I did not want their friendship—I only wanted their brains, their talents, their names, or their beauty to make my salon brilliant, and they took very good care themselves to let their light shine out.

“At last I have found you, gracious Fräulein ! It is impossible to get near you, the crowd of your worshippers is so great. Permit me to present to you my friend Herr von Amstetten. He was so unfortunate as to find you out when he called.”

It was Dr. Ranzoff who made this speech. I was grateful to him for making it so long, for it gave me time to recover from my surprise. For the friend he was introducing was—the “King of Dogs.”

But what an abominable title it was that I had given him ! “King” alone would have been more suitable ; and yet not even that, for the dignity and majesty of a king were not there. He had youth, joined to strength and beauty. These qualities

were displayed in the tall, supple figure, in the rapid movements, in the smiling mouth with the touch of sarcasm lurking in the corners, even in the mass of golden-brown hair which, rising with a slight arch from the broad forehead, fell back in thick locks. And then his eyes—his shining, sunny eyes ! What was it they reminded me of ? Ah, of Siegfried, the hero of the “Nibelungen Lied,” of whom it is said :

“ Ihr Leuchten erschien so wunderbar lodernd,
So seelenversengend, als habe die Sonne
Von sich einen Theil in Siegfried versenkt.”

If I had been Chriemhilde, I should have lowered my lashes before this hero ; but the maidenly shyness which is so pleasing in other girls would have seemed absurd in me. If it is not the thorn, it is at least the moss which half conceals the rose ; but if one is not a rose, why should one wear moss ?

So I struggled against my emotion, and tried to reply to Herr von Amstetten's greeting with my accustomed self-possession. He used the same phrases as other mortals, and such as “good form” prescribes, which brands everything that savors of originality as a crime ; but they sounded differently from his lips, spoken in his rich voice, with a slightly foreign accent. To what nation could he belong ? His “Fräulein Sarneck,” of which I had got so tired, as every one must of one's own name, sounded

quite new and interesting to me with the sharp *S* and the strongly rolled *r*.

Then he had a habit, which I have often noticed in very tall men ; they are apt to bend down very low when they speak, often lower than is necessary to make themselves understood. This habit had always been rather displeasing to me in other men. They bring their dark or blond beards in unpleasant proximity to one's cheek and whisper, with a mysterious air : "Did the gracious Fräulein go to the theatre yesterday ?" When they tried this manner on me, I always used to draw back and say, coldly : "I beg your pardon, I am not deaf." But, strange to say, in Herr von Amstetten this same manner did not affect me in the same way. He was so tall that he seemed to have a right to bend down ; and then his motions were so easy, and his brown hair fell so gracefully over his forehead that I did not find courage to draw back or to make unkind speeches.

I would gladly have talked longer with him, but my attention was claimed by other guests. And then I had to conduct to the music-room a celebrated pianist, who entertained a part of the company with her brilliant playing. For a while I saw him standing with other gentlemen in the door-way, but then, during a magnificent *fantaisie* of Schubert's, he disappeared. I wondered if he did not care for classic music. I begged the artiste to play the

popular Faust waltzes of Gounod (though I by no means approve of the Italianizing of our national hero); perhaps that would attract him. But he did not make his appearance again.

At length I, too, left the room. I had to look after my other guests, to assure myself that my old gentlemen and ladies were being amused. I had had a number of card-tables set out in the Cinderella Room—certainly a desecration of this room, against which the fairy princess would have protested vehemently.

Everything was going on as well as possible—whist, skat, l'ombre, were all flourishing. The players were so deeply engaged that no one noticed me, except a comfortable Commerzienrätthin who, sunk in a deep arm-chair, was sitting by a table with an album which she had just opened.

"Ah, my dearest Fräulein!" She made as if she would get up from her chair, but sank back again, in obedience to a gesture from me. "You must really bestow a few moments on me to tell me about these photographs. I am sure they are all friends of yours, are they not? One can see how much you have travelled—such curious costumes!"

The good lady was mistaken. I know of nothing in worse taste than to spread out all the portraits of one's friends in the salon for general inspection. It is an indiscretion toward those whose faces are thus

displayed, and it is a presumption toward those to whom they are displayed. And then the stupid reiteration: "This is my brother's friend, this is my friend's friend, and this is my friend's friend's friend."

No, I have never been guilty of such a crime against my friends and my guests. The album contained the portraits of celebrated painters, which accounted for the costumes which seemed so remarkable to the good Commerzienrätthin. I explained this to her, and told her the names of the artists.

"Holbein, Dürer——"

"What a curious cap he has got on his head! One would think——"

"Raphael!"

I heard a step behind us.

"A handsome head. I have seen him before. But how young these artists look—as if they had not done anything at all."

"He was very young when he died."

"Really? What a pity; such a celebrated artist! But that is always the way."

He had passed on behind us. I could see his shadow on the opposite wall, where it towered high above Cinderella's lilac-tree. However, to be long is the natural characteristic of every shadow; even I, short as I was, was glad to feel sometimes that

my shadow, at least, was tall. How was it, then, that I was so sure to whom this shadow belonged?

"You should not trump!" came harshly from the nearest whist-table.

"I should not have been obliged to, my dear baron, if you had followed my lead with hearts," was the reply, in a sharp voice.

He—that is, the shadow—went up to the table beside the "dear baron," perhaps to protect him from the sharp voice. I could see him, though, without looking at him.

"And this beautiful woman here? Is she an artist, too?" asked the Commerzienrätthin, who did not trouble herself either about the whist or the shadow.

"Yes; it is Angelica Kaufmann."

"Oh, yes, of course. She is really a perfect *beautesse*! When one is so beautiful one's self one does not need to paint pictures, I think—one ought to be painted one's self."

She looked at me with an air of triumph over her logic, but I was looking at him. He was actually smiling at me. He, too, was amused at the logic of the good Commerzienrätthin and her *beautesse*.

I patiently continued my explanations, and he remained standing opposite us at the card-table. At length a servant came in with refreshments, and I helped the Commerzienrätthin to some lobster

salad, while Herr von Amstetten drew a table up beside her chair.

She was delighted. She had a perfect passion for lobster salad ; but now her husband must have some refreshments, too. He was over there at the whist-table, where he had just lost his game.

Herr von Amstetten brought him up. I gave up my place to him, and gave a hint to the waiter to look after them both. Then I took Herr von Amstetten's proffered arm and walked away with him.

"Where would you like to go, gracious Fräulein?"

I thought for a moment. In the dining-room, the guests were crowding round the buffet ; in the music-room, they were just beginning to dance. I would rather have gone to the conservatory, but there I ran the risk of finding no one ; so I decided on the yellow boudoir, which was between the music-room and the picture-gallery, and was little frequented without being absolutely remote.

He was obliged to bend over to give me his arm. I looked at our figures for a moment as we passed through the door of the Cinderella Room, in which were two great mirrors. How insignificant I looked beside his magnificent figure ! And the black-lace dress which I wore, adorned with yellow roses, no longer pleased me. Why did I put on so sombre a

dress? It did not suit this brilliant assembly. Oh, if I were only a Chriemhilde!

The boudoir was nearly vacant. Only two artists were standing before the black marble mantle-piece, a masterpiece which I had bought from an old castle in 1866. I sank down into a low chair; the yellow satin of its covering just matched my roses—that must have a harmonious effect. Herr von Amstetten remained standing near me.

"Pray, sit down," I said; "you are too tall for me to look up to."

"And you don't like to look up to any one?" he asked, with a smile.

"Not physically; it is uncomfortable."

"Physically or mentally—I think it is always pleasanter to look down than to look up."

"Do you think so? I am of a different opinion. I think every woman—every *true* woman, gladly looks up to real greatness, to real superiority. It is her happiness to admire, to worship."

"That is strange! You are the last person I should expect to give utterance to such an opinion."

"Why?"

"Because—" He hesitated, and in some embarrassment he brushed his hair back from his forehead. "Pardon me; I spoke thoughtlessly. Spare me the explanation."

This evasion, of course, roused my curiosity.



"AND YOU DON'T LIKE TO LOOK UP TO ANY ONE?"

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"Oh, I shall not let you off," I cried, eagerly. "You are caught by your own words, and you can only escape by a full confession. Pray, tell me the truth—I can bear it," I added, more seriously.

"Really? You are promising a great deal with a very careless air."

"Careless, but nevertheless true. But you are trying to escape me—and I will not allow that. Why did you not expect such an opinion from me?"

"Well, then!" He looked me steadily in the eyes. "Because they call you cold and proud."

The color came into my face in spite of my self-command, and I could not sustain his piercing glance. But I had provoked the offence—if it were one—and I could not complain.

"Who calls me so?" I asked, eagerly.

"The world in general."

A gentleman who had been standing on the threshold for a while now came into the boudoir.

It was Dr. Ranzoff. Was he "the world"? I almost thought so, from the angry glance which Herr von Amstetten cast upon him. How his face changed! The brows were drawn together, and a scornful expression rested on his lips.

It was strange, and yet this same man had brought him to me and had called him "his friend."

Dr. Ranzoff at length seemed to comprehend

that he was not welcome. He bowed silently, and joined the two artists by the mantel-piece. Nevertheless, I felt oppressed by his presence; at any rate, I could not continue the conversation that had taken so personal a turn. My companion also was silent. Did he wish to drop the conversation?

The notes of "The beautiful blue Danube" floated in to us from the adjoining music-room. I called Herr von Amstetten's attention to it, and asked if he would not like to dance?

"Certainly, if you would do me the honor to be my partner," he replied, politely.

How I should have enjoyed it! It must be delicious to float around the room with him! I liked to dance, and I danced well. But I had long ceased to dance in my own house. Every gentleman would have felt bound to invite me, and as hostess I could not have made any exceptions.

I explained this to him.

"Then you will permit me also to decline." He looked through the door into the music-room. "There seems to be no lack of gentlemen—you have taken care of that. I have already observed what an excellent hostess you are. You sat beside the old lady with the photographs, just now, like patience on a monument."

"Not more so than you, when you looked on at the whist-table," I retorted.

"Oh, I"—he looked at me with a smile—"I am not at all patient by nature. But I only saw you, and was waiting till you were free."

He said this so naturally, so simply, that it did not sound like flattery. Nevertheless, I felt that I had never met any one so agreeable. For this I may say, by the way, that it is one of the current untruths of women to declare that they do not like flattery. Of course, a stupid, clumsy compliment that bears its falsity on the face of it will not please any clever woman; but a delicate, skilfully turned compliment, not pointedly aimed at her, but let fall *en passant*, gives pleasure to most women. At any rate, I was not above enjoying it.

I wondered if Dr. Ranzoff could hear us. He was talking to the gentlemen, but I could see by the turn of his head that his attention was fixed on us. At length, when he saw that there was a pause in our conversation, he came quickly up to us and said, abruptly: "Was it not a Feuerbach that you showed me the other day, Fräulein Sarneck?"

"How can I remember that? You require too much, doctor."

He bit his lip. "Pardon me. I thought you might remember the picture—you seemed to be so delighted at getting it. It was a somnambulist——"

"Oh, that! Yes, of course, I remember. It is upstairs in the library."

"May we not see it, too?" asked one of the artists.

"Certainly; I will have it brought down. Dr. Ranzoff, will you be kind enough to attend to it?"

I felt that I owed him this reparation for my first rude answer. For I knew he would look on such a commission as a reparation. It flattered him to be treated like an intimate friend.

In a few minutes the picture, with the easel on which it stood, was brought in.

The subject, "The Somnambulist," is well known. A woman in a long white night-dress, with a candle in her hand, is standing on a terrace brilliantly lighted by the moon. The charm of the picture consists in the different effects of light: the calm, silvery moonlight, shining full upon the figure, makes the white garment shimmer like snow; mingling with it, the little yellow flame of the candle, which casts its flickering glow on the pale, drawn face; the vaporous, ghostly appearance of the somnambulist, as she sets her bare foot on the outer edge of the precipice, filling the spectator with terror lest she should plunge down the next moment—the double effect of this peculiar mingling of lights, carried out with the skill of a Feuerbach, and the situation, which the imagination carries on to completion, had charmed me with the picture and had determined me to buy it.

We looked at it for a while. Then one of the artists said the light from the chandelier above us spoiled the effect—the light ought to come from the side on which the moon shone in the picture.

We were curious to see the effect ; and the obliging Ranzoff brought lamps, while the artist turned the gas down to the lowest point.

“You see, the effect is infinitely better ; just a little more to the left, a little farther back,” cried the painter to his companion, who, holding a large lamp in his hand, with his eyes fixed on the picture, was looking for the point which would produce the greatest effect.

“Splendid ! wonderful !” we cried in one breath as a brilliant side-light shone full on the picture. But at that moment we heard a peculiar, rushing noise, a cry escaped our lips—it was not the lamp which lighted up the picture so wonderfully, the curtains were in a full blaze.

“Help !” gasped out Ranzoff, rushing to the electric bell near the fireplace. But Amstetten called to him to be quiet, and, shutting the door of the adjoining room with his foot, where the music and dancing overpowered every other sound, he caught the heavy damask curtains which hung outside of the lace ones, and tore them down with one strong pull. Then he sprang into the middle of the shimmering yellow satin waves, from which the

flames leaped up around him—a veritable Siegfried in the midst of the crackling flames of the Hinderberg !

“For heaven’s sake, let them burn, but do not expose yourself !” I cried, helplessly stretching out my arms to him from the low chair into which I had fallen in my fright. But he thrust every one away.

“Let no one come near me—you, least of all, with your lace !”

But the other three gentlemen had not been idle. They had moved the furniture off the rug, and now they folded the heavy woollen mass around the burning curtains and the stamping hero.

In a few minutes the fire was extinguished. In the midst of the smoke which filled the room I sat like one in a dream, gazing at Amstetten, who was brushing his singed hair off his forehead ; but his hand twitched as he did it, as if in pain.

That recalled me to my senses.

“You are hurt—I will get you something for it,” I stammered, hurrying away. Mrs. Tremlett had in her room a whole chest of remedies, which she was accustomed to apply to the servants ; among them was a bottle of lily-oil, which had often proved effective in cases of burns.

I do not know now how I managed to find the remedy so quickly and return with it, but in a few

moments I was back again with the oil and the necessary bandages.

In the mean time Herr von Amstetten had taken off his gloves, which had at first protected his hands from the fire, but now in stripping them off made his wounds doubly painful. I had to take off the remnants of the fine kid from his burnt palms. It was a painful operation, such as I had never undertaken before—had never even thought I could witness—not to speak of performing it myself. I felt cold in all my limbs, I felt absolutely sick with pain, and drew a long breath, like one freed from physical torture, when at last I was able to apply the cool lily-leaves.

He watched me with a smile, though his lips occasionally twitched with pain.

I could not utter a word of gratitude or sympathy, but I felt one tear after another falling on my hand, which was busy with the bandages. At length, one fell on his hand ; greatly shocked, I brushed it off, but he whispered, as he bent down over me : " Leave it ; it is a balsam, too."

Good heavens, how tender his voice sounded ! It was the first time I heard that tone, which I shall never forget !

" And now, gentlemen, go back to the company," he said, turning to the gentlemen, who were busy gathering up the ruined fragments. " You will per-

mit me to withdraw, Fräulein Sarneck—no one in the other room seems to have noticed our little display of fireworks—my hands would betray it.”

“Is your carriage here?”

“No, I did not order it till later.”

“Then you must let me offer you mine. Herr Doctor, will you be so good as to order it?”

Dr. Ranzoff left the room—not quite so willingly, it seemed to me, as on the former occasion when I had given him a commission. The two artists, obeying Amstetten’s injunction, had gone into the music-room, where every one was dancing.

We were alone. Was that his intention? I almost thought so, for he said, with a smile, looking at his bandaged hands: “I cannot take your hand—your skilful little hand—which has wrought such a work of mercy upon me, so I must content myself with your glove.”

He stooped and picked up one of my gloves, which I had thrown on the floor in my haste, and concealed it in his breast.

Why did I not laugh at this theatrical action, as I should have done if it had been any one else? Why did the blood mount so hotly to my cheek and make my heart beat so fast that it almost took my breath away?

“The carriage is ready; will you let me accompany you, Herr von Amstetten?” I was rather glad

to see Dr. Ranzoff appear. A low bow—and the two gentlemen were gone. I remained standing on the spot where he had left me. When the portière fell behind them, my listening ear caught the words : “ Well, you were in luck ! ”

It was Ranzoff's voice which spoke—what did he mean by it ?





CHAPTER IX.

LIKE one in a dream I moved about among my guests for the next hour ; as if in a dream, the tones of the music sounded in my ear and the forms of the dancers floated past me. I listened dreamily to the parting words of my guests, receiving their thanks for a "charming evening." Then I told Mrs. Tremlett, who had seen nothing of the little catastrophe, what had passed ; that is, that a curtain had taken fire and Herr von Amstetten had burned his hands in trying to put it out. I begged her—by the way—to send a servant round to Herr von Amstetten the next morning—the coachman knew his address—to inquire for him, as I should probably sleep late, I was so very tired.

She left me, quite reassured, since I was not injured. I, too, went to my room and let my maid undress me. Then I dismissed her, and, wrapping myself in a dressing-gown, I hurried to the drawing-room on the other side of the house,

It was almost two o'clock ; all was still, and darkness reigned everywhere. The faint light in the little silver candlestick that I had taken from my toilet-table scarcely showed me the nearest objects. I slipped noiselessly through the carpeted corridors and through the empty rooms, as if I were committing some crime. What was I looking for, at this unusual hour ?

There—there it was ! On the table in the drawing-room stood a great bowl of old Sèvres ; its gilded stand gleamed in the faint light of my candle. It was the place where I kept my friends in effigy—the artists and men of science, the privy councillors and the councillors of commerce, the counts and barons, with their wives and daughters—all lay there, thrown in pell-mell. Here was a solid banker, with a great glazed card and stout letters ; there an aristocratic maiden lady, with a fine, pale-yellow bit of pasteboard with a baroness's coronet in the centre ; the crushed card of the timid *protégé*, which, in his embarrassment, he has kept turning over and over in his hand, beside the satin-smooth one of the high official whose titles and dignities are half-concealed by the artist's card—only the leaf torn out of his note-book—on which, with a few bold lines, he has drawn his own profile.

But what had I to do with all these ? I carelessly flung them aside, aristocrats and democrats alike.

I was looking for one card alone, which must have been left within the last few days—was it to be found here? The cards often found their way into the waste basket, or into the fireplace. What if *his* had, unluckily, got lost? The candle gave so little light that it made my search more difficult. What if I lighted the gas? But no, it might be noticed; some one might come. I trembled at the thought, as if they would have detected me in a crime.

At last—that was it! I picked up the card with delight, as if I had found a treasure. Yes, there it stood; his name, in clear, plain letters on the white ground—Feodor von Amstetten.

Feodor! That was what I wanted to know, his Christian name. It sounded a little strange, like a Russian; but it was a good name. And when I had spoken it softly, two or three times, it no longer sounded strange to me.

There was nothing else. No “Ph. D.” or “First Lieutenant” in such and such a regiment, or “Attaché at —;” nothing that would indicate his profession. Had he none? That would be a pity. I don’t like a man to be idle, merely because he is not obliged to work. Besides, idleness is so tiresome. I knew that from experience. But I would wait. I would not judge hastily.

Mechanically I laid the other cards back in the

bowl, and I hurried back to my room with my treasure, as quickly and as softly as I had come. There I shut the card up in a secret drawer of my dressing-case, and went to bed. My last waking thought was—"Feodor."





CHAPTER X.

ONE evening ! This tiny atom in the short space of time that we call life, and yet, what endless thoughts and sensations can it contain within itself ! For me this one evening was the "hour" *par excellence*, its events "the world," and the man who was its central point, "the man." I was not in doubt about it for a moment—*this* man I loved. I had seen him at the sea-side and admired him ; I had spoken to him for the first time that day, and loved him. I did not know who he was, what his character was, or his position—no matter, I loved him. Without a struggle, without trying to withstand it, I had yielded to the all-conquering sway, and I rejoiced in my downfall.

I would not marry—certainly not ; but was that any reason why I should not fall in love ? I had made no vow to that effect. On the contrary, I had rejoiced when, that other time, the painter had made my heart beat faster. Why should my heart be different from those of other women—even the

loveliest and most admired on this globe? But what was that feeling in comparison with this? The painter had been a middle-aged man—grave, dignified, a worthy object of esteem; in this man there was nothing grave or dignified—I was not sure that I could look up to him even—but I *loved* him, *loved* him, and would always love him, and him alone.

With this consciousness I began the next day—it was a new life for me. I had slept but little, and my head ached—I felt I must go out. The morning was gray and rainy; nevertheless, I had my Lightning saddled and rode out, accompanied by Hans the groom.

The fresh air and the movement were something. The outward excitement calmed that within. And I was alone, I was not obliged to listen to Mrs. Tremlett's remarks about the toilet of Frau von A—— and the unlady-like conduct of the two Fräulein B——, and how many glasses of wine the poor Tapeur, who played for the dancing, had drunk. I could give myself up to my thoughts undisturbed—and that was always something.

So I lived over again the scenes of the preceding evening, from the moment when the tall figure first stood before me, and I, shivering slightly, had looked up at him, to the last parting glance that his eyes had cast upon me. Not a word, not a movement, not a smile had escaped me; and of all things, I

dwelt most on the dark frown on his proud forehead when Dr. Ranzoff had approached us. How faithful is the memory when the heart comes to its aid.

My Lightning, unaccustomed to such careless guidance, trotted soberly along the Steglitz road, while Hans, probably no less surprised at this sleepy gait, followed us. Suddenly it occurred to me that the answer from Herr von Amstetten might have arrived ; I turned at once, and now, to the astonishment of both Hans and Lightning, I made my way home at a mad gallop.

The answer had arrived ; Herr von Amstetten was tolerably well. He had not slept much, but his injuries were slight.

"Not slept much—but his injuries were slight," I repeated, thoughtfully. Was it the same reason that had kept me awake—because not my hands but my heart was inflamed ?

I replied absently to my good Tremlett's questions how the fire had started, and if the yellow curtain was to be replaced just as it had been before, and what I would have for dinner, etc. Only to the question whether I would receive to-day did I reply decidedly in the affirmative.

Party-calls are not usually my delight, but to-day I looked forward to them with pleasure. Every time old Thomas opened the door to announce a

fresh visitor, my heart beat at the thought that it might be *he*—and even the others were more interesting to me than usual because they seldom failed to make a remark on the stranger, whose appearance had created quite a sensation. To some of them he was not unknown; some had met him at the Russian ambassador's, others at the Artists' Club. One lady said he had a stage-box at the opera-house; "probably," she added, with a smile, "because it is easier to throw his enormous bouquets from there. Last week he threw the Minelli a bouquet of lilies of the valley so big that she could not lift it—all the gardens of Berlin must have been plundered to make it," she concluded.

I listened to all this, and thought it very natural. Why should he not pay homage to our prima donna, as other men did? An enormous bouquet thrown in public was not dangerous—if only behind the scenes— But what was it to me? I did not ask that he should love me; it was enough for me—or so I thought—to love him.

In the course of the afternoon Ranzoff came. I had expected him, and would gladly have spoken to him alone. He would be the best person to give me information about his friend whom he had introduced to me. But before I could lead up to the question which was the sole subject of my thoughts, my aunt, the old Geheimrätthin, appeared.

How vexatious ! She had not been able to come the evening before, and now she had come to hear about everything, and to ask all manner of questions.

The little black eyes fairly snapped with curiosity. She scarcely allowed herself time to explain to me how absolutely impossible it had been for her to come in the midst of all the confusion of painters and carpenters in her new house ; and then there was the inconvenience of finding the rooms higher than her old ones, and of having to piece out all her curtains ; "for you know, my dear child," and here her eyes made an inventory of my furniture as if she saw it now for the first time, "that I, the widow of a simple official, am not in a position to get new ones, as you could do."

I knew it very well, but it was impossible for me to put my purse at her disposal in the presence of Dr. Ranzoff ; only I made a mental memorandum of it as I buried my feet, as usual, in Zokko's long black fur. At the word "curtains," Ranzoff looked significantly at me, and so confused me that I did not even express my sympathy for her over the shortness of her curtains. She required no answer, however, but, returning to the subject of last evening's party, she continued :

"And your party was so delightful. The Commerzienrätin K—— came to see me this morning,

and she told me about it. I was in a state of mind. I had hardly a corner to put her in. However, old friends, you know; we went to school together. Yes, and she was quite delighted with your house; it was so beautiful and so comfortable. Yes, my niece understands that sort of thing, doesn't she, Dr. Ranzoff?"

The doctor agreed with her conscientiously, but at the same time he gave my poor Zokko a slight kick, so that he lifted up his head.

"And such interesting people," she continued, untiringly. "Good gracious, Bella, if you wouldn't always keep that dog about you!" and she drew her black dress anxiously away. "Yes, very interesting people! The young Russian was there, too, I hear. Herr von—what is his name, now? The Commerzienrätthin always gets so confused over names."

"Do you mean Herr von Amstetten?"

Ranzoff said the name carelessly, stroking Zokko's head as he spoke, against which the latter protested with a growl, for he did not love Dr. Ranzoff. The dislike was mutual. At the same time, however, he squinted at me (Dr. Ranzoff, that is; not Zokko, he was very straightforward always and never squinted). I saw it behind my handkerchief, which I had put up to hide a yawn, which was cut short by the words just spoken.

Now, however, I pretended to yawn. The ridiculous fellow, was he pretending to be jealous? I had already noticed it yesterday. "Well, you have had luck!" I could hear those words still. But what did it matter? I should hear something about *him* now, and that was much more important.

So he really was a Russian, as his first name had led me to suppose. His slight accent also confirmed it. For the rest, his German was so pure and so elegant that no one would have suspected him of being a foreigner. But that was very natural. Dr. Ranzoff was just explaining to my aunt (not to me; I was very busy with Zokko) that, though Herr von Amstetten had been born and brought up in St. Petersburg, his parents were German. His father was a large wholesale merchant, and had been consul there.

My dear aunt! How thankful I was to her for coming! She relieved me from the necessity of asking questions. I could lean back comfortably in my chair and listen silently to the conversation between these two. And my aunt required no assistance. She understood the art of cross-questioning very well. But Ranzoff was disposed to be reticent—or, did he know nothing more himself?

"Yes, and he has travelled all over the world—" My aunt nipped at the first finger of her black glove,

in which she had just discovered an indiscreet opening. "And why shouldn't he? Such a rich young man! Bella has travelled a great deal, too. Only there were special reasons why he stayed away from Berlin for so long."

"Indeed?"

"Good heavens, Dr. Ranzoff, you don't pretend you don't know!" (But he did not look as though he did not know; on the contrary, he winked at the Geheimrätthin, as if to beg her, in the presence of a young girl—that was I—not to speak of such things.) "Every one was talking about it—you were away at that time, Bella, or you would have heard about it——"

"But, my dear Frau Geheimrätthin!"

"My dear doctor, I understand—but Bella is no longer a child, and I, as her aunt, though really I am only the cousin of her late mother, consider it my duty to warn her. Well, Herr von Amstetten was *attaché* to the Russian embassy here at that time, and he had an affair with a countess, or princess—countess, wasn't it, doctor?"

"It may have been."

"And a duel with an officer of dragoons; or was it the husband of the countess? For she was a married woman—only think of it, Bella, such a scandal! And he had to give up his position."

I could see very well how sharply Ranzoff was

observing me, and I exerted myself to appear indifferent, but it was of no use.

"Really?" I said, as carelessly as I could. I took Zokko's head between my two hands and looked into the large, true eyes of my old friend. "Yes, that unhappy duel! But did not your son have a duel at the university, dear aunt, and about a lady, too?"

"Good heavens, that was only a trifle—only students' nonsense—a cut on the cheek, which happily does not show, now that he wears a beard. He is coming here at Christmas-time, Bella, for the first time as assessor, and is so delighted at the idea of seeing you again! But, as I was going to say——"

What my aunt was going to say has never been divulged, for at this moment the white head of my old Thomas appeared, and these words sounded in my ear:

"Herr von Amstetten wishes to know if the gracious Fräulein can receive him?"

Good old Thomas! I wonder if your wife found your voice as melodious when you made her your offer as it sounded to me now. I wonder if she felt as much like falling on your neck as I did at this moment. It was really very hard to keep down all my overflowing gratitude, and to bow indifferently, and speak quietly the stereotyped "He is very welcome." But, beneath the impertinent, search-

ing looks of my two guards, I succeeded tolerably well.

I could see how Dr. Ranzoff put his eye-glass on his nose in order to observe me more closely, and my aunt hid her defective gloves in her muff—then he was standing before me.

My first glance was directed to Herr von Amstetten's hands. He wore silk gloves, which covered the slight bandage without pressing it. I could not inquire about them in my aunt's presence, but my eyes looked the question. I dared not ask, and he smiled his reply. There was something wonderfully intoxicating in this exchange of looks, which we alone understood—this harmless secret which we shared together. To be sure, Ranzoff knew about it, too—that rather lessened my satisfaction.

He only remained a short time. He was dining with a friend—a Russian name—but first he wished to be assured that the excitement—of last evening, he added—had done me no harm.

"The excitement?" repeated my aunt, who was listening like a school-girl.

"Yes, it was such a large party! But Fräulein Arabella" (his *r*'s and *l*'s seemed to make a new word of my name) "is accustomed to receive her friends, and understands the art of being a hostess admirably."

It was only an ordinary compliment—a few more

phrases, and he was gone. At last the other two also took their departure. When I was alone I rang for the servant, and ordered him to admit no one else.

"Very well, gracious Fräulein. The gentleman left a bouquet for the gracious Fräulein—shall I bring it in?"

"What gentleman?"

As if I did not know! But I like to go through the form before my old servant.

"The last one who came—Herr von Amstetten. When he heard that you had visitors, he asked me to give it to the gracious Fräulein later."

"Then bring it in."

I was pleased with this bouquet as if it were the first one I had ever had, as if I had not received hundreds of bouquets in my life. But—had he not given a bouquet to the Minelli the other day? The Minelli! Bah! To-day for her, to-morrow for me! I sprang up angrily. How dared he? But no—he threw it to her on the stage, publicly, before thousands of eyes—but he would not give it to me in the presence of one other—

There stood Thomas with the bouquet—yellow roses surrounded by a rich *volant* of black Spanish lace—the colors I had worn yesterday! I took the bouquet, blushing with pleasure. Minelli was forgotten



CHAPTER XI.

“Meine Ruhe ist hin,
Mein Herz is schwer,
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmer mehr.”

I HAD been reading “Faust” through, lately—no, I had really read only the love-scenes, and the only thing that remained in my memory were the above lines. All the philosophy of the hero, all the wit of *Mephistopheles* had left no impression on my mind; I had only understanding and compassion for poor *Gretchen*.

How well Goethe knew a woman’s heart! That is commonplace, you will say. But commonplaces are only so because they contain generally acknowledged truths—and whoever has just *experienced* such a truth, for him it is new.

So it was with me. Everything seemed new and changed to me. But the greatest change of all was in myself. What had become of all my resolutions, my principles? Never to believe in a declaration

of love, never to give myself to a husband, to remain free all my life—that is what I had vowed to myself. And now? I listened for the slightest word that brought me a breath of the fragrance of love, and I was no longer satisfied to love myself, as I had foolishly believed I should be at first—no, I wanted to be loved also; I had only one ardent desire, to win his love, to belong to him. No, I no longer knew myself.

The week that elapsed between my first and second reception-evening was a life-time for me. Why did not mine end with it? Oh, happy are they who may drink the sweet cup of existence, and then sink into oblivion—happy they who, like that wonderful flower, blossom into fuller life at the kiss of love, which fills their whole soul with color and fragrance, and then fade and die! Happy, thrice happy, are they to whom such a fate is given!

But man “does not die an easy death like a flower.” His poor heart must break by degrees.

But in those days I did not think of dying. I *lived*, really lived—fully, entirely, with every fibre of my soul, with every throb of my heart. I felt as if it were the pure unalloyed breath of life that I was breathing, and every new day brought me new nourishment.

My “Blue-Book” grew rapidly at that time. The details would make a book in themselves, though it

would only interest me and—all lovers. I will give here only a short extract from it.

Thursday, when my *soirée* took place, was the point from which I began to reckon time. Friday, I had seen him for a few moments, and had received the bouquet. Saturday, I managed matters so that I could see him alone. I made Thomas inquire, when each caller came, whether I was at home, and I received no one until he came; and then, in order that the exception might not seem remarkable, I received one or two more.

What did he say? What did I reply? Nothing very special; certainly, nothing very clever. I was glad to be able to ask him about his wounds. He showed me his hands. They were already nearly healed.

"The lily-oil and your bandages have worked wonders," he said. "To-morrow, or the next day, I hope to be able to hold the reins again. May I hope you will sometimes accept my escort? I know you like to ride."

We appointed Tuesday morning for a ride.

"And you must not mount a horse before that," I said. "The reins would hurt your wounds, and then a sensitive horse so quickly perceives the difference in the hand holding the reins. You might have an accident. You will promise me, won't you?"

He did so, although he assured me that his Emir was a lamb in his hands, even though he might be ever so unskilful in holding the reins. "Nevertheless," he continued, and a slight shade of sadness dimmed the light of his eyes, "nevertheless, I promise you willingly, and thank you for asking it. You would not believe, my dear Fräulein, how good it is to feel that some one cares for you, especially when one has not been accustomed to it for years."

And then, in reply to my questions, he told me that he had lost his parents, one after the other, five years before, "just as I became attached to the embassy here," he added, hesitating slightly. "Since then I have been homeless. I am tied to no place, bound by no duty. Do you know, that that is a very sad condition of things?"

I knew it. I understood it perfectly. To any one else who had made me such a confession I should probably have given a moral lecture on the necessity of making duties for himself by adopting some career. But as he sat there in the deep arm-chair, his head bent slightly forward, so that the loose lock of his hair hung half way down his forehead, he looked so delightful, with the unusual expression of melancholy about his mouth, that I never thought of the moral lecture.

I told him something about my life, which greatly

resembled his own—outwardly, at least. Our inner life must differ greatly. We only touched upon that lightly : I, because I could not expect him to understand the sorrows of an ugly girl ; he, because the pleasures of a young man upon whom all the good things of life had been bestowed was hardly a theme to discuss with a young girl. Nevertheless, I felt that his words contained something like a confession ; perhaps he thought I should hear something to his disadvantage, and he wished to forestall it by his own confession. Well, I was ready to grant him absolution for everything.

When he got up to go, I thanked him for his flowers. They were standing beside me on a black marble table set in bronze—the colors of the bouquet. He appreciated the compliment of this—I saw it in the lighting up of his eyes. Then he turned to me again, and said : “Do you like flowers for themselves or only as a sign of homage ?”

A strange question ! I was obliged to think a moment before I replied. Then I looked frankly into his sparkling eyes, and said : “Of course, I like flowers—who does not ? But—you will probably think me very unpoetic, very worldly—the flowers that grow for me naturally do not give me so much pleasure as those that come from the hands of friends. I am not even soft-hearted enough to be sorry that the poor things must die so soon on their

wired stems ; they have fulfilled their mission, they have bloomed and given pleasure. More, we mortals—or we women, at least—do not require.”

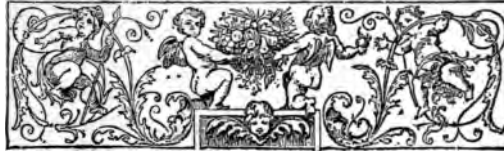
He looked down at me, slightly nodding in assent ; and then, without another word, he bowed over my hand and hurried away.

After that I received a bouquet every day, and it was always something rare and choice. Now my initials were wrought in the middle of the bouquet ; then it was a cornucopia of flowers ; sometimes only a few magnificent flowers loosely tied together. They were left at my door every morning, and old Thomas always brought them up to me with an expressive smile. And I had left off trying to disguise my pleasure in them before him ; I had done with that farce !

And my good Mrs. Tremlett ?

She saw everything, understood everything, and —was silent. She knew just when to stay with me and when to go away. Oh, she was a treasure ! But I could not confide in her, I could only trust my secret to a mother's tender heart ; and as I had lost her, I had to be satisfied with my “ Blue-Book.”





CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY—I went to church. Great happiness, like great sorrow, makes us religious. I felt that I must thank the Giver of all good, not only in my quiet chamber but openly. It is a pity that thank-offerings are no longer the custom, for they certainly meet the needs of the human heart. I could not sacrifice a hecatomb, but after the service there was a collection taken up for the poor, and the sexton who passed the silver plate bowed respectfully as I put in several gold pieces.

For the evening I had taken a stage-box at the opera opposite his. I knew that he would be there, but I had not told him that I intended to be present. The Minelli sang; I wanted to see her—this person to whom he threw costly bouquets. Not that she was unknown to me, for I had already seen her as *Valentine*, as *Elsa*, as *Fidelio*, and I don't know in how many other *rôles*; but to-day, for the first time, I saw in her only Signora Minelli.

Concealed behind the curtains of my box, I could see him and observe her. The opera was "L'Afri-

caine," and the Minelli played *Selika*. How changed she looked with the dark stain on her face, and yet she was not ugly. The slender figure, the regular features, still lent her charm sufficient—ah, I could not compete even with her !

She often looked up to the stage-box on the right, where he sat. He had several young men with him ; they talked gayly between the acts, and even during the singing they whispered together. He never would have permitted that if he had been greatly interested in the singer ! But he looked to-day as if he were not interested in anything—he leaned back in his arm-chair, weary and languid. It gave me great pleasure to see him look like that to-day.

The Minelli also perceived it, but not with pleasure. She tried to attract his attention. She sang the words : "Thou knowest not the secret grief of my heart," to Herr von Amstetten instead of to *Vasco*. Afterward, too, in the love-scene with *Vasco*, it seemed to me as if her eyes sought his—but she waited in vain for some special sign of applause ; at least, no bouquet was thrown from that box. I went home with a feeling of deep satisfaction, and listened patiently to all the remarks of my good Tremlett about the unnatural piece, the magnificent manzanilla-tree, and the disgraceful toilet of the heroine.

Monday—I had invited for this evening a small party to supper—*him*, among others, of course. Among the other guests—we did not go beyond the number of the Muses—were Dr. Ranzoff and my aunt. The good woman came to see me now almost every day, although she was still engaged in moving. She was anxious about me, and she was making a final effort to win me for her Emile. She could not understand how I could resist the temptation of becoming Frau Kreis-Gerichts-Assessor. On the other hand, to preserve me from the danger which she saw hovering over my head in the person of the young Russian, she faithfully reported to me all the gossip that she could collect about him. Ranzoff also exhausted himself in innuendos—he seemed to have come to his conclusions very quickly. I let them talk, and—was silent. It was so natural that the crows should try to blacken the swan! And then why should he, of all men, be free from faults? I knew that the sun had spots, but I could not discover them myself, and I loved the sun as it seemed to me.

I had placed Herr von Amstetten beside my aunt at supper. I wanted him to fascinate her. And he understood me; he was so attentive to her, uniting English chivalry with Russian elegance, that he entirely accomplished his aim, which was my own. The manner in which he waited upon her

at supper, listening the while like a martyr to her complaints about her lodgings in general, and her newest one in particular, was exemplary. She proved not inappreciative of his efforts, and whispered to me, afterward : " Really a charming young man—if he were only not such a man of the world ! "

That evening I did not exchange twenty words with him ; nevertheless, I was quite content. I had sat opposite him, had enjoyed his pleasantness, his sparkling conversation, and at parting he said to me : " I have not seen anything of you to-day—but, to-morrow ? "





CHAPTER XIII.

TO-MORROW! I heard it the whole night through, just as he had spoken it, with the rolling *r*. I had often tried to say it as he did, but it never sounded as it did from his lips. To-morrow—Tuesday! At twelve o'clock he would come for me to go to ride. I had never seen him on horseback yet—how splendid he must look! I, too, looked very well on horseback; my slender figure looked taller in the long habit and the tall hat, while the air and exercise flushed my usually colorless cheeks. And then I rode well. Oh, my Lightning, how I loved you that morning!

Of course, *he* looked like a god on his fiery black horse—his Emir—and his riding was as magnificent as his swimming. I told him then that I had seen him in Ostend (in riding one can say such things as are apt to call up a blush, much more easily than in an ordinary call), and I even confessed what nickname I had given him.

"King of dogs!" he repeated, somewhat piqued. "That is rather mortifying to one's pride. It is not very flattering!"

"But quite comprehensible," I replied, teasingly ; "for it was your dogs that first called my attention to you."

"One is fortunate to have dogs, when one has nothing else worthy to attract a young lady's notice."

His eyes flashed a side-glance at me, as he said these words in a mocking tone. But I was in a teasing mood to-day. For the first time I had a consciousness of my power over him, perhaps from the feeling that I was appearing to advantage. Then the fresh, strong autumn air, as we rushed through it at a gallop, put me into high spirits.

"Do you see that hedge there ?" I pointed to it with my riding-whip. "Let us leap that."

"That hedge ? Pardon me, Fräulein Bella, but you cannot know the country about here—you cannot take that hedge."

"We will see that."

I gave my Lightning his head, and flew toward the spot. But just before I reached it, and before I could urge my horse to the leap, he had overtaken me, and, seizing my bridle, with one strong pull he brought the animal to a stand-still, so that it foamed at the bit.

I was bitterly angry for the moment. "How dare you ?" I gasped out, almost breathless.

"Guard you from committing a folly ?" he said.

"Look at me for a moment, but don't stir from the spot." And suddenly putting spurs to his Emir, and giving a loud shout, he disappeared from my sight in an instant.

I could not suppress a slight cry. What had he done? Not regarding his command, I galloped close up to the hedge; there stood the black horse on the other side, snorting and trembling, while he bent over it and stroked the slender neck. But between him and the hedge lay a ditch at least four feet wide, filled by the late rains with muddy water; I had not been aware of that, certainly.

"You see how unpleasant it might have been for you," he called to me, pointing to the ditch.

"And how will you get back again?" I asked, somewhat abashed, knowing very well that the leap from the other side was much more difficult.

"The same way that I went over," he smiled. "Please move your horse a little to one side."

I obeyed silently. In another minute his Emir was standing beside my brown horse.

"We riders of steeple-chases are accustomed to that sort of thing," he said, as we rode slowly on; "but you will acknowledge that it was not a leap for a lady to make."

I threw my head back a little defiantly.

"Are you so sure of that? Every one who knows anything about the matter says that a woman can

do these things as well as any man, on account of her firmer seat in the saddle. I have a great mind to try it, now that I know exactly how the land lies." I was turning my horse, but he laid his hand on my arm. "I entreat you not to do it," he said, gently. "A woman should not do everything she is able to do. Feats like that are only fit for circus-riders."

That was unendurable! To humiliate me so! I tried to make some sharp retort, but could find no words. I felt quite crushed, and the worst of it was I could not even be angry with him for it. I rode on beside him in silence.

But he did not push his advantage. With the fine tact I had often admired in him, he told me how he had been at home on horseback from his childhood, and how he had learned to know the country during his former sojourn here. Thus he half-excused himself for his superior horsemanship and knowledge of the ground.

Ah, I gladly yielded the palm to him in this—I had told him, myself, that to the true woman it is a delight to look up with admiration! The sensation was new to me; still newer that other, of submitting to the will of another. My head still rebelled against that, it is true, but my heart——

It was late when we reached home. Mrs. Trem-

lett shook her curls. "To stay out so long without your breakfast, and without Hans—you ought not to do that."

But I laughed at her. We had not missed Hans, or the breakfast either—at least I had not.





CHAPTER XIV.

WEDNESDAY—a number of letters on the breakfast-table, as usual. Not that I kept up a very extensive correspondence—letter-writing was not my forte—but besides the invitations, complimentary notes, etc., I had begging letters almost every day—from the dirty, ill-folded letter of the poor workman, which contained, in impossible spelling, a comfortless story of “no work and seven children,” to the finely written note of the broken-down artist or the unrecognized genius, who required of me compensation for the lost or withheld recognition of a thankless world. In order not to be too unjust, either in granting or refusing these petitions, I had entered into relations with one of the overseers of the poor; often, however, the impression which the letter itself made decided my course, and I flattered myself that with time and experience I had attained to a tolerably correct judgment with regard to the truth of the complaints.

But the letter which I held in my hand on that Wednesday morning, while Mrs. Tremlett read her English newspaper, did not belong to this class.

The envelope, of thick, cream-colored paper, indicated elegance in the writer ; the address, on the other hand, was in an unformed hand, almost like that of a child.

I opened the envelope with some curiosity—it contained verses ! A sudden thrill passed over me—were they from *him* ? But no, that was not a man's handwriting—certainly not his ! I turned the page—there was no signature. From whom could it be ? My eyes glanced quickly over the lines, and again I felt a thrill, but this time of anger. For these were the contents of the letter :

“ There was once a maiden fair,
Who vowed her heart with none to share ;
And of all her suitors, small and great,
Thought no one fit to be her mate.
O maiden fair, disdain not all.
Pride goeth oft before a fall !

“ A stranger came from foreign parts,
Well skilled was he in winning hearts ;
His polished speech and manner gay
Made foolish hearts his easy prey.
He coolly watched this maiden fair—
‘ She, too, will fall into the snare ! ’

“ O maiden fair, be on thy guard,
The stranger's will is stern and hard ;
He has broken many a faithful heart :
Of iron his—it feels no smart.
Resist his wiles, keep thyself free,
Or there will be no peace for thee ! ”

"Abominable! outrageous!" I hurriedly crushed the elegant sheet of note-paper in my hand. Who could have the insolence to write me such a thing as this? I smoothed the paper out again, and examined the handwriting. No, it was not disguised, it was simply unknown to me.

It was the writing of a woman, and of a woman who was unaccustomed to writing. This was betrayed by the difference between the beginning and the end. At first, the letters were formed slowly and carefully, then the writer had grown more careless, and at the end the writing had degenerated into a scrawl. Form and material also pointed equally to a woman, and, to clinch the argument, a delicate perfume scented the note. What perfume was it? I went to the farthest window to escape the aroma of the coffee and inhale the perfume alone. It was lily of the valley—*parfum muguet*— "Ah!"

I uttered this exclamation so loudly that Mrs. Tremlett looked up from her *Times* and asked what I had there. But I did not betray myself. I knew now who had sent me this abominable poem. No one but the Minelli. She was fond of lilies of the valley, and he had thrown her an enormous bouquet of these flowers; this unaccustomed handwriting was hers, no doubt. So it was an access of jealousy, nothing more!

At first this thought calmed me. But then I read

the impertinent verses over and over again, and every word stung me. How dared any one address me so, and slander him like that ?

“ There was once a maiden fair,
Who vowed her heart with none to share.”

How did she know that ? And then :

“ His polished speech and manner gay
Made foolish hearts his easy prey.”

Abominable ! Even though they were barefaced lies that were thus spoken of me and of him. But it was not a lie, with regard to me at least ; and he—was it not his “ polished speech and manner gay ” which had won my heart ? What else did I know about him ?

My old pessimism awoke again. What if, beneath this elegant exterior, these agreeable manners, were concealed an unreliable character, a cold, selfish heart ? What if this intellect, this many-sidedness that I had so often admired, only gave out flashes now and then, but not a clear, steady flame ? I had known him and loved him for eight days, and because I had loved him ever since I had known him, I had never really known him.

But I defended him in my heart. If he were really of a shallow nature—a man of the world, in the common acceptation of the term—why did he

seek me? What was there in me to attract him? It could not be my wealth (that was a great comfort to me), for he was rich himself, entirely independent; the celebrated beauties of the salons, the celebrities of the stage, the daughters of the aristocracy would all have accepted his homage with delight. And he had sought *me*, though I possessed neither rank, nor name, nor beauty; nothing but a heart which had become conscious, through him, of all its wealth of love—an intellect that could keep pace with his own.

I was still engaged in this inward struggle when his bouquet arrived. Lilies of the valley—what an unlucky choice! As soon as Thomas had left the room, I threw the poor, delicate children of the spring, that had come into the world so out of season, into the blazing fire. With a sort of vengeful joy I looked on while the greedy flames, after they had eagerly devoured the rich lace envelope, slowly sucked out the life-juice from the green stems till, at length, nothing remained of all their fragrant beauty but a glowing mass of wires which was distinguishable for a long time from the coals till, at length, it all sank together in the general blaze.

With burning, angry eyes I had watched the work of destruction; when it was completed, I went slowly into the adjoining room, my library, threw myself on the divan, and—cried.

I wept bitter, scalding tears, which fell slowly and heavily on the dark damask of the divan, wept from the fulness of my sad heart, as I had never done in my life before. And why was this? Why did I lie here despairing, comfortless, when only yesterday I had swept along by his side, radiant with joy, when only a few hours ago, in a happy, hopeful spirit, I had waked in sweet expectation of the day and what it would bring me? Ah, it was not only the base insinuation of the heroine of the stage that had changed me so—but it had wakened me from my dream of bliss, it had sown doubt in my breast:

“He has broken many a faithful heart;”

and,

“She, too, will fall into the snare!”

sounded again in my ears.

But I would not let myself be caught! He should see that I was made of different stuff from that doll with the fragile heart!

I sprang up, impatiently brushed away my last tears, and pulled the bell.

“I am at home to no one,” was the order I gave to Thomas.

Before he left the room I called him back to ask if the studio had a good fire in it.

He looked at me in amazement. I had not entered the room for more than a year, had not

touched a brush in all that time. But now I suddenly felt a desire to paint, as the best method of occupying my thoughts. Reading would only have been an occupation for my eyes—playing on the piano, for my fingers; nothing occupies the mind except our own creations. A subject had come into my head that suited my mood and gave it expression. Yes, I would paint.

But the studio was the coldest room in the house. It was directly over the large hall, and had been originally a sort of antechamber, which, on account of its large northern window, had seemed to me suitable for my object. But, in order to paint, one requires warmth, or else the fingers will be stiff. Thomas promised to see to it. The house was heated throughout by hot air, but each room had its fireplace, which was more valuable for purposes of beauty and of ventilation than for the dispensing of heat.

An hour later I was sitting in the long-deserted room, busy with my brushes and palette. Before me was my model, a small white marble table, with an artistic antique bronze setting, thrown down upon it a splendid rose, hanging its crimson head over the edge—devoted to destruction.

I had got the flower from the conservatory myself. The delicate calyx, resting on a slender stem, was of a peculiarly rich color, bordering on yellow, which

always reminded me of a Southerner. I was very fond of this kind of rose, and had christened it "l'Impératrice Joséphine," because a picture of the famous creole, which I possessed, had a similar tinge of color.

So this object, the carelessly crushed rose, possessed a deep interest for me. But I could not get into the spirit of my work. I experienced, too, after my long neglect, the technical difficulties in a great degree. The outline was flung on the paper quickly enough, but the background for the marble; to give its smoothness and brilliancy——

Ah, there was the door-bell! It could be heard distinctly in the studio. My brush dropped; rose and marble were forgotten; I was listening to what was going on down-stairs at the foot of the steps. If I opened the door a crack, I could have both seen and heard, but, of course, I could not do that.

The porter had opened the door, and, having given his answer that I was not at home, closed it again. Probably it was only an indifferent caller, who was glad enough to have done his duty so easily. I took up my work again, but it did not get on. Again the bell! Decidedly, I must make some change. It disturbed me too much to hear everything so distinctly.

The visitors came in swarms to-day, as if they knew that I did not receive any one.

• It seemed as if the bell would never stop ringing. And at every sound my heart gave a sudden throb, and I would listen again to try and distinguish the voice, to guess who it might be—till the dull thud with which the heavy oaken door closed gave me a moment's peace.

Again! It was very late; almost dinner-time. He always came either very early or very late. Besides, he had an especial manner of ringing; short and sharp, like some one who is accustomed to being waited upon. No doubt it was he! My brush flew over the paper, making a big blot of sepia just where the rose ought to be. I found myself, I scarcely knew how, at the door, the knob in my hand—listening.

I, Arabella Sarneck, listening! If any one had told me yesterday I was capable of such a thing I should have poured the vials of my wrath down upon them, but that did not affect me now. I only felt that *he* was near me. I could hear his voice, which possessed the power to make my heart beat faster and my eyes shine.

The porter informed him in his softest, blandest tone that the gracious Fräulein did not receive to-day.

"She is not ill, I hope?" he inquired. When I heard the *I* in "ill" I was quite certain. No one else spoke like that.

I could not hear the porter's reply, but a moment later the massive door swung to with a groan. The sound pierced my heart with pain, such as one feels when a coffin closes and shuts out a beloved friend from our eyes forever. Was it really all over?

All over! And instead of that, he might have been sitting beside me, explaining everything. Explaining! What was there to explain? Could he defend himself? Could I accuse him, even? No; no explanation was possible, and, moreover, none was needed. My eyes had suddenly been opened, and I could not fall back into my blindness again.

A long, dark, dreary day, and a still longer, darker, drearier night followed. My good Tremlett looked at me anxiously the next morning, as the deep shadows under my eyes betrayed my sleepless night, and my faithful Zokko sympathisingly licked my hand as I gave him the piece of toast which usually formed my breakfast. But neither of them—I was going to say, ventured to make any inquiries (does it not seem, sometimes, as if such a clever animal could speak?). It was a very silent, uncomfortable breakfast.

Then I had some arrangements to make for the evening, for it was Thursday—my reception-night! Horrible thought! To wander about through the same rooms again, among the same people, as I had done a week before, when he was among them, when

I had sipped the first draught from that cup of bliss, the foam of which had so intoxicated me, and whose bitter dregs I was now tasting. Would he come to-night? If he did not, what were all the others to me? And if he did, if he had the audacity to come, then—well, then he should see that I had the courage to ignore him!

There was his morning greeting, his bouquet! On a ground of white immortelles, an interrogation-point in forget-me-nots. Very cleverly thought of—but the question would remain unanswered. I would not burn the poor blossoms, but I left them, to Mrs. Tremlett's great amazement, carelessly lying on the breakfast-table, gave orders to Thomas to admit no one, and betook myself to my studio.

My work of yesterday was thrown away, I had to begin again. The poor "Impératrice Joséphine" had been standing in water since yesterday, but she looked rather withered, notwithstanding—*verlebt* seemed to me the suitable expression, for form and color remained, only the fragrance and freshness were wanting. This was exactly what I wanted for my idea. I could have cried over her, as she lay there dying on the hard, cold marble—a broken heart!

To-day I worked with a will, and the little picture made rapid progress.

But the hour for visits renewed the cling-cling of



HE STOOD IN THE DOOR, FRAMED IN THE CRIMSON FOLDS OF THE VELVET CURTAIN.

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NO

NO

yesterday. I heard it, in spite of the portière I had had put up before my door ; and there it was again, that was *his* ring, short and sharp. Oh, now I wished the portière, that prevented my hearing more, miles away ! Mechanically I drew back the heavy curtain. Yes, that was his voice, louder than usual——

“The gracious Fräulein is not ill ?”

I could not hear the reply.

“Then I will come in—I will take the responsibility on myself !”

He dashed up the stairs, springing up two or three steps at a time, as only he dared do ; a moment of breathless expectation—and the door flew open.

I stood leaning against the table, one hand pressed on my heart, to quiet its wild throbbing, the other stretched out, as if to keep him off. He stood in the door, framed in the crimson folds of the velvet curtain, while the gold cupid that held it up smiled down on his brown curls.

“Herr von Amstetten !”

I uttered the words with difficulty—they sounded harsh, almost threatening.

“Ella !”

I can hear it now—my name as he had altered it, as it fell from his lips for the first time. Why had no one else, not even I, ever thought of this

diminutive? Ella was so much prettier than Bella, which I detested. He, and *only* he, had a right to give me a new name, for he had made a new creature of me.

My hand sank down, my eyes lost their fire.

"Ella!"

The sound intoxicated me. It was no longer the name alone, in its new form and the slight Russian accent; it was the tone, the expression, an indescribable something—anger and love, reproach and entreaty, seemed to be concentrated in that single syllable.

He knelt down beside me, he took my trembling, icy hands in his.

"What have I done that you should banish me? You are angry with me; tell me why. The greatest criminal is not condemned unheard. Tell me my crime, so I can defend myself."

Crime! guilt! Who spoke of such things? Who accused him? Not I. I only saw that he was at my feet, that his eyes looked imploringly into mine—everything else was forgotten.

"Ella, you do not speak. Oh, whatever it may have been, it is over now; is it not? I may be with you again—may tell you that I love you; love you, Ella, do you hear? and that you must love me, my Ella, my bride, my wife!"

It must have been some look in my eyes, my entire

surrender, that gave him the courage for such impetuous wooing, that made it possible for him, springing up as he uttered the last words, to fold me in his arms and strain me to his breast. I laughed and cried at the same moment, but I could neither withstand him nor utter a word ; and if I had tried, his kisses would have closed my lips.





CHAPTER XV.

It was a long time before we came back to the every-day world, but after a while I found myself sitting on the little divan at the farther end of the room, under the great copy of the Sistine Madonna, which nearly covered the entire wall. Not only the picture, but the whole room, the whole world, seemed to me filled with smiling angels' faces.

"And now tell me what I have done?" he asked, after we had been talking nonsense for a long time.

What he had done! I had to stop and think. Oh, yes :

"He has broken many a faithful heart,"

sounded in my ears like a half-forgotten melody. Nor did I doubt the truth of the accusation now—I felt such absolute certainty that mine would break, too, if he deserted me. But could I tell him that? Show him that abominable poem? Never!

But perhaps he would guess my thoughts from the picture I was painting. It was only a sketch, it is true, but still it was far enough along for him to recognize the subject. I led him up to it in silence.

He looked at me inquiringly. As he moved, he brushed against the little table so that the rose that was lying on the edge fell down. He did not see it, and set his foot on it.

"Ah, the poor Empress Josephine!" I cried, and I felt that I turned pale.

"Who? The rose?" He picked it up with a smile, as I pointed to the crushed flower.

"Poor thing!" I almost snatched it out of his hand, and looked at it with a feeling of compassion, which, I am ashamed to say, I have seldom felt for a human being.

He frowned, and there was a slight impatience in his tone as he said: "You will tell me why you were angry with me."

His look and tone brought me back to myself.

"You have crushed the rose," I said, in a low tone, "before I had time to catch its likeness on the paper here. I christened this kind the Empress Josephine, and this fading rose, lying carelessly on the marble, seemed to me a type of the noble woman whom the ruthless conqueror so mercilessly sacrificed to his ambition."

He looked attentively at the half-finished picture.

"Very pretty—a poetical idea that you have begun to embody with a good deal of skill. So you are an artist, too? What a talented wife I shall have! The marble promises to be very good—it

looks almost transparent. If you take liquid carmine for the rose it will give more softness to the outlines."

I stood silently by, with half-averted face. He talked and criticised, and seemed to have forgotten that I had been angry with him. That hurt me.

At length he perceived that something was wrong, and that reminded him of his question. He repeated it.

I pointed silently to the picture. He looked at me in surprise.

"I am to guess why you were angry with me? But I do not like that sort of thing. Tell me frankly."

But I could not tell him. I sought in vain for an answer. And yet I must say something, if I would not appear childish.

He drew his brows together, his brilliant eyes took on an angry expression such as I had noticed in them on the first evening of our acquaintance, when Dr. Ranzoff came up. There was a sound of suppressed wrath in his voice, as he said: "Not a mere caprice, I hope? I hate capricious women!"

That was too much! I could make no reply to that—half-turning away, I handed him the anonymous letter.

He cast an angry, searching glance at it; then, when he read it through, his face brightened up

(oh, how relieved I felt !), and he cried out, with a smile : " So that is the *corpus delicti* ! And you were trying to illustrate this with your Impératrice Joséphine as a ' broken heart,' and I, like a true Napoleon, trod it under foot ! Capital ! But, my *duschinka* " (I did not understand the meaning of the Russian term of endearment at that time, but it sounded so soft and sweet, and he made up for my want of knowledge by putting his arm around me), " if this rhymed rubbish sufficed to keep you shut up away from me for two whole days, you must be a perfect *Othello* for jealousy ! "

" I—jealous ! " The very thought of it overwhelmed me with mortification. " No ; it is *she* who is jealous "—I pointed to the letter—" and perhaps with reason."

" Are you sure that it is a ' she ' ? "

He stood before me like a judge (if judges are ever so handsome and so aristocratic), as if *I* were the person undergoing examination, and he had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

" I suppose so."

I looked timidly up at him—did he really not recognize the handwriting ?

" H'm—it is possible ! " He examined the letter with a cold but searching glance. " An unaccustomed hand, almost like a school-girl's. The verses, on the other hand, flow quite smoothly ;

apparently the poet and the writer are two different persons. Do you wish me to find out about it?" he inquired suddenly, throwing his head back proudly, and looking straight at me.

"No, it is not worth while." It was the only thing I could say, under the power of his eyes; and I felt it, too, at the moment. Nay, even more, I took the slanderous paper from his hand and threw it into the blazing fire.

"That is right," he cried; "we will burn the worthless rubbish, with the broken heart and the illustration into the bargain!" And before I could prevent him my sketch also flew into the fire.

Such a high-handed proceeding! I was struck dumb.

"Herr von Amstetten!" I cried, impetuously.

He looked smilingly down at me.

"Feodor is my name, if you please, the only one to which I shall answer in future, and only then when it is spoken very softly and gently. Try it once."

"But it is not a soft name," I replied, still pouting.

"If it were, what merit would there be in making it sound soft? The softness must be in the tone of voice. Come, Ella!"

Yes, it was in the tone. He proved it to me when he uttered my name. I was conquered.

"Feodor!" I said, softly. "Is that right?"

Oh, I had already had some practice in speaking his name—it was by no means new to me. But I could not tell him that.

"Ah, now you are my *golubuschka* again, my little dove," he cried. "I love you when you are like that! Say it once more—and then again. What a sweet voice you have!" And he kissed me on my lips.

I would gladly have told him that I liked my new name, as he had made it, much better than the ordinary "Bella," but then I thought he would ask why I did not like "Bella;" he would be reminded of the significance of the name, which was so unsuited to me—no, I could not speak of it to him—not yet.

I do not know what train of thought brought to my mind the remembrance that this was my reception-evening. I reminded him of it, and added that people would be surprised to hear that we were engaged.

To my surprise his brow darkened, and he asked, hastily, if it were necessary to announce our engagement to-day.

"And why not?" I inquired, rather coldly. "What reason have we for keeping it secret? Besides," I added, in some embarrassment, "I should be sure to betray myself, for I am not accustomed to concealment."

"You are right," he cried, throwing his head back as if in defiance of an unseen enemy ; "we have nothing to conceal, the whole world may share in our happiness."

And then we consulted together as to how we should arrange the evening. Oh, how charming it was to consult with him, who understood me so well, and yet knew how to enforce his own opinion, instead of with Mrs. Tremlett, who always said yes to everything I proposed. And yet—a drop of bitterness mingled even in my cup of happiness. The English formula sounded in my ears : "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" Ah, I had no father or mother, not even a near relation who could act as father to the bride, and announce our engagement to the assembled company—I was such a poor, lonely creature.

At length we decided that my aunt and Mrs. Tremlett should receive the guests and should make the announcement (the importance of her position and the pleasure of spreading such an astonishing piece of news would comfort my aunt for a slight disappointment with regard to her son) —and then I would join the company with Feodor.

Dear Mrs. Tremlett ! How delighted she was when I threw my arms round her neck and told her all about it ! How the tears rolled down her thin cheeks and mingled with her long brown curls !

"You see, my dear child," she said at length, "it has happened just as I said. When the right man comes it is easy to say yes. When Captain Tremlett asked me to marry him I could not refuse him, although I had kept single till my thirtieth year. And, besides, it is much better for you to do it now than to wait, like the Baróness Burdett Coutts, till you are sixty."

Then she smoothed out her long curls and composed herself again.

My aunt, who rushed up in response to my note (in horrible old gloves, for which she excused herself by saying she had caught up the first that came, in her haste), was not so easily appeased. First, there were tears for her Kreis-Gerichts-Assessor, then tears of emotion over her niece (she never spoke again of the more distant relationship), then questions about "his" family, his circumstances, his opinions, his intentions, and his prospects. I had hard work to get rid of her, and finally only attained this much-desired result by begging her to buy a new cap for the evening. That carried her off at last.



CHAPTER XVI.

THAT malicious mirror ! Couldn't it lie a little bit to-day, just for to-day ? But no, it assured me, with pitiless truthfulness, that my toilet was irreproachable, but, as far as I was concerned personally, there was much to be desired. A bride radiant with happiness—and pale, sallow cheeks ; a blissful smile—and a huge mouth ! Oh, how well I could appreciate the feelings of Madame de Staël, who would have given all her fame if she could have been for only *one day* as beautiful as her friend Julie Récamier. She did not wish it, probably, when she celebrated her triumphs at the German courts, or among the English aristocracy. It came uppermost, no doubt, when she met Mathieu de Montmorency, or when she married secretly the Duc de Rocca. I had no fame to sacrifice, but I would have given all my riches to be beautiful for this one evening.

Is love really blind ? Feodor declared I looked charming ; like an elf, was his expression—but a fire-elf ! That satisfied me, for I only wished to please

him. But the Impératrice Joséphine that I had put into my pale-yellow dress did not meet with his approval. He replaced it by a little bouquet of roses carved in coral in all shades which he had brought me.

His first present. I was delighted with it. He was surprised at my pleasure.

"I thought you would be quite *blasée* in this respect," he said, "as you can always gratify every wish yourself."

"That is just it!" I gave him my hand to button my white kid glove. "Since my father died no one has ever given me anything, and I am so fond of presents."

He carefully buttoned the glove (a long proceeding, since there were six buttons) and said, with a smile: "Six and a quarter, or only six? But I know it is six. I saw it on the glove that I took from you as a souvenir a week ago."

A week ago to-day? Was it really not longer than that? This week had seemed like an age to me, it had been so full of events.

He offered me his arm to conduct me downstairs. I hesitated a little. This chat with him was so delightful, and I dreaded to see all the people. It seemed to me as if they would disturb my new happiness with their curious looks and chattering tongues.

But it must come. My good Tremlett came herself at last, in a great state of excitement, to announce that they were waiting for us, and the Frau Geheimräthin was quite impatient. So we went down—I with a beating heart, and yet so proud and happy !

Soon we were standing in the Cinderella Room—the handsome fairy prince with his bride. It is true, the latter had nothing of Cinderella except her rich robes and her humble gratitude for her undeserved happiness—the beauty which had shone out from the ashes, and dazzled every one, was wanting here.

Otherwise, however, they were all there—the step-sisters, plenty of them !—who offered their congratulations, and yet were so bursting with envy that the roses and lilies in their lovely faces were almost yellow ; and the step-mothers—no less numerous—who had destined the prince for their own daughters, and, while they congratulated us with their sweetest smiles, wished the happy Cinderella in the deepest depths of her ash-heap ; and the courtiers were there also, with compliments and hand-shakes, which, although the masculine sex is usually more honest than our own, in this case were not more sincere, for many of them had sighed in vain for this Cinderella, the richest heiress in Berlin, and now a foreigner had carried her off !

I saw and felt all this. I knew very well that the Frau Baronin, who had just assured me of her heartiest sympathy, whispered immediately after to the Frau Presidentin that here was another proof of what riches would do; other girls, who had only beauty and amiability (with a glance at her daughters), could not aspire to such a *parti*. I heard—or thought I heard—the stout Commerzienrätthin saying to her neighbor that money always would cling to money; but I did not care, I played out the play to the end. I smiled, thanked them, returned the hand-shakes, and only exchanged a significant glance with the man by my side, who looked triumphantly down on all the envious throng.

Then Dr. Ranzoff came up to offer his congratulations. Involuntarily I looked up at my betrothed—yes, there was that shadow again on his brow, that same dark frown, the threatening expression of the eyes, which the doctor returned with a slight nod of his head. What did it mean?

I tried to keep Dr. Ranzoff, who was turning away after offering a commonplace congratulation, while my aunt—radiant in her new cap and her freshly cleaned kids—claimed Feodor's attention. I must know what there was between these two!

What a martyr-air he put on, the poor doctor, and how ill it suited his pink face and his thin, light hair! I wanted to tell him so, but a happy bride

always has a great compassion for a rejected lover. So I kept back my satirical remarks, and asked him, going straight to the point, how long he had known my betrothed.

“How long? A few weeks. I met him at the Artists' Club.”

There was an air of constraint, of hesitation, in his reply that did not escape me.

“You seem to have got acquainted very quickly,” I said, continuing my catechism, “for it was you who introduced him to me.”

He made a gesture as if to draw his hand through his hair, as he was accustomed to do when he did not know what to say; but the fear of disarranging his beautiful curls restrained him from this manifestation of embarrassment, and he said, with more the air of a martyr than ever: “Yes, unfortunately! If I could have dreamed of what I was bringing to you——”

“So you grudge me my happiness, Dr. Ranzoff? I thought you were my friend.”

“Friend?” He shrugged his shoulders. “You know that did not satisfy me. But you told me—and that was my only comfort—that not one of your friends, though he might be ever so dear to you, would ever induce you to break your vow to remain unmarried. And now——”

“Ah,” I said, with a smile, “are you a poet, and

yet do not know that between the dearest friend and the lover there is a wide gulf?"

But he seemed to be really angry. "You ought not to descend to such hair-splitting," he replied, bitterly. "You should recall what Goldsmith said of women: 'Constant only in inconstancy.'"

That passed the limit of my patience, even with a rejected lover. I turned coldly away.

"Pardon me!" he cried. "You must know how very painful this announcement—but let it pass" (with the air of a very resigned martyr)—"I will not embitter your happiness by a display of my pain; nay, to spare you the sight of it I will even go into exile. I am going to leave Berlin."

"Indeed!"

I could not help it if my exclamation betrayed my pleasure; the news was too unexpected, and my dislike to him, whom my betrothed never met without a frown, had increased too much. But I tried to smooth over my rudeness by asking, with some show of interest, where he thought of going.

"To America—to Boston—I was invited to go there some time ago to deliver some lectures, but I could not make up my mind to leave Berlin. Now I shall accept at once."

"Then I wish you success and rich laurels."

This wish was quite sincere. After this last announcement I could no longer doubt that he had

loved me, and this conviction awoke in me a deeper sympathy. I even felt a sort of gratitude to him—his love made it easier for me to believe in Feodor's affection for me, which still seemed to me like a miracle.

I let him go, with the request to come and see me before he sailed. He promised, and kissed my hand; but when I looked up at him I met his eyes, so full of anger that I shrank before them. Had his love for me changed into hatred?

At last the guests had all departed—earlier than usual—for, after the great event of the evening, everything else seemed to fall flat. Every one seemed to have but one desire, to go home and talk it over with their friends. Feodor sat with me in the yellow boudoir, whose new damask curtains reminded us of the eventful fire of a week before. I looked at his hands, which still bore the scars, and wondered how I could turn the conversation to Dr. Ranzoff, for now it occurred to me how he had evaded my questions. Feodor would have to be more communicative!

To my surprise, he anticipated me by asking suddenly what I was talking so earnestly about with Dr. Ranzoff.

"I was asking him about you," I replied, in a half-playful tone, beneath which I tried to conceal how much in earnest I was.

"About me? I hope you did not—" He sprang up suddenly from his low seat, and stood before me in all his stately height. "What did he say about me?" he inquired, with the sharp tone and the frowning glance that I had already noticed in him.

But to use such a tone, such a glance to *me*, on the very day of my engagement! My displeasure conquered my timidity and I said, coldly: "I have no answer to make to such a question, put in such a tone."

"Pardon me," he said, heartily, taking my hand. "You are right, but—" He drew his hand across his forehead. "He is an old admirer of yours, has worked with you, dedicated his last book to you——"

"The 'Mosquito Bites'!" I said, laughing. Yes; I could laugh again, heartily, gayly, for this reply gave me the key to the problem whose solution I was seeking. It was jealousy that was the cause of his dark looks at Ranzoff, that had made him so violent with me. Jealous! Oh, I could have cried with joy! I had not been vain enough to think of it. Quite radiant, I looked up at him and told him, with all the humor of which I was capable, the origin of that extraordinary title. He was greatly amused, and we chatted and laughed till poor Mrs. Tremlett, our chaperon, warned us, by her perilous

nods in the arm-chair by the window, that it was high time to say good-night.

I parted from him with my heart full of happiness and gratitude. But when I sat alone in my room (I had sent Louise away, who, I thought, would never be done expressing her delight, and who was already talking of the trousseau !) I saw again that last black look with which Dr. Ranzoff had left me, and a feeling of vague discomfort came over me. Was it a presentiment of the evil that this man was to bring upon me ?





CHAPTER XVII.

Do the scenes of the ride and in the studio remind you a little of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," dear reader? I was constantly reminded of it during my engagement, and yet there was little enough of the famous *Katherine* about me; neither her beauty nor her wit, nor her self-will. No, I did not have *her* self-will, but I had my own; my own will, which was used to ruling, and found it hard to yield and be submissive to another. But Feodor really had something of *Petruchio* about him, in his manner of carrying out his own will under the pretext of caring for me. The pretext, do I say? No, it was really so. I recognized that, but submission has to be acquired, like everything else, and I did not find the lesson easy, in spite of my loving master.

The first cause of dispute was about the time of our marriage. I wanted to wait until spring, for I hate cold weather. It contracts my chest, makes my hands red, and my face blue, and the blood seems to flow more slowly through my veins. Why,

then, should I go through, at this time, a ceremony which I wanted to enjoy with all the strength of my heart and soul ?

And then, the journey !

For we would go on a journey ; on that we were agreed. But to travel in winter, when one is always cold in spite of heated coupés and piles of furs—continual colds, tender looks out of weeping eyes, loving words in a hoarse tone—*quel horreur !* So I pleaded eagerly for the “wondrous lovely month of May.”

“So long ?” Feodor said, at first. “You do not long for our union.”

“But I am so happy now. I like to enjoy all the pleasures of an engagement.”

At length his real reason came to the surface. He did not like it that I, who was all alone, should preside over a great house, and receive visitors. “For a young girl just engaged, it is not suitable,” he said.

“And my good Mrs. Tremlett,” I asked, gayly. “Do you know, you strict Mr. Grundy, that together we number seventy years ? Isn’t that enough ?”

But he was not to be convinced. The gay young man of the world, who thought everything allowable for himself, was as strict and rigid when it was a question of his bride as the most narrow-minded, proper old maid, and reduced the limit of what was

allowable for her to its lowest terms. It was trying, was it not? And yet, strange to say, I did not feel any anger, but rather felt pleased that any one, that *he*, cared so much for me, and treated me so like a young girl.

So, of course, I yielded, and our wedding day was appointed for the eighteenth of December.

And our journey? This, Feodor assured me, I alone should decide upon. But I was anxious about it. I *would* have my way on this point, and so I was afraid to express a wish that should not coincide with his.

"Yes," I said, quite humbly, studying his face closely the while, "I thought it would be pleasant to be quite quiet for the first few weeks—at Helmsstedt, say."

"*Your* estate?"

How sharply that *your* was emphasized! I corrected him, eagerly—"Our estate."

"Certainly, that would have been very pleasant in spring, but to go to a lonely country-house in Silesia in winter! That is not to be thought of," he said, settling that question.

The "mine" and "thine" had suddenly put another idea into my head. "I have it!" I cried, gayly. "We will go to *your* home. Let us go to St. Petersburg!"

There—again, that slight frown, the hardly per-

ceptible compression of the lips, which I already had come to dread when he was about to oppose me. But this time, I said to myself, I would be firm ; this time he must yield.

"Yes, to St. Petersburg," I repeated, eagerly before he could reply. "To the splendid great city of the Czar. It is new to me, and I always wanted to see it ; and now, since it is your native place, I want to see it more than ever. Please, please, say yes !"

Already I was pleading where I was accustomed to command, and when he himself had given me my choice ! But his eyes and mouth were saying no, too plainly.

"How illogical these women are," he said, at length, with a smile. "In the first place, she does not want to be married in the winter because she hates the cold ; and then she chooses St. Petersburg of all places on earth, that capital of ice, for her wedding journey !"

"Because one feels the cold much less in Russia than in warmer countries," I replied, firmly. "You have already told me that—I am not so very illogical, and—it is settled, we will go to St. Petersburg, shall we not ?"

But he remained firm.

"I am very sorry—really, dearest Ella, I do not like to deny you, but I am afraid we must give up

St. Petersburg." (As if *we* were giving it up!) "You call it my home—so it is, and I hope to show it to you some day, but not now. Just consider; I have no house there now, we should have to stay at a hotel, and Russian hotels—but you have no idea what you would have to go through."

"Nothing that I could not put up with, I am sure," I persisted. "Besides, we could send a courier on before to attend to everything for us."

"And then, St. Petersburg in the height of the season. First, you choose a lonely country-house in order to pass the honeymoon quietly, which is what I wish also; then you go to the other extreme, and plead for St. Petersburg, where we should not have a single moment we could call our own, where we should lose each other entirely in the whirl. You would not stand it for a week."

He would not give in—for the second time! Tears came into my eyes—but I would not cry. Other women get their way by crying—but that course was denied to me, for it was far too unbecoming. Ah, what cannot a beautiful woman ask for, what can she not venture to do? A pout which gives a childish charm to a lovely mouth, a smile through tears which lights up the beautiful features with spring sunshine, a coy denial of the kiss of reconciliation—all these coquettish arts are at her disposal, to charm and enslave her lover—but I

dared not venture upon them—they did not suit me.

So I kept back the tears of vexation, and said, as calmly as possible : “ I should think, in a large city like that, that every one would be free ; we could travel incognito.”

He laughed aloud.

“ I incognito in St. Petersburg, where I know everybody, and everybody knows me ? No, that would be impossible. I should have to call on every one with you ; should have to present you at court. We should hurry from one entertainment to another, making a wild pursuit of pleasure—very brilliant, no doubt, very magnificent—the most elegant and gallant society in the world, not even excepting Paris——”

I was conquered—no, I no longer desired it. What could I, the poor Cinderella, do in this brilliant society ? And, besides, the beautiful Russian women, so celebrated for their charms ! It was really good in him to run away from this temptation. Perhaps, too—some memory—how many women had he admired ? How they would wonder at the choice their hero had made—how easy they would think it to renew their influence beside so insignificant a rival ! “ Why did he marry her ? ” I could hear them whisper. “ She is rich, to be sure, but then so is he——”

Oh, thank God that he is rich ! If he had not

been, I would rather have let my heart break than have become his wife. His wealth was my guarantee that he loved me ; he need not think of such minor details, and yet he had chosen me—*me*, insignificant as I was—instead of one of those lovely, brilliant women. Oh, how happy I was !

So the idea of St. Petersburg was given up, and after I had discovered, through a few judicious questions, that Italy would suit him, I proposed to go there—the old, commonplace wedding-journey to Italy, where one suffers from the cold far more than in St. Petersburg, which we both knew by heart, and where the hotel comforts leave much to be desired. We both knew this very well ; but, as we were determined to travel, we had to decide upon some place to go to, and Italy would serve as well as any other.

From there we would return to Berlin. It was Feodor's intention to try for a diplomatic post. It is true, there were some difficulties in the way—in consequence of a stupid youthful escapade, as he shortly remarked ; but he did not doubt that eventually he would accomplish his desire, which was also mine. But until then we would remain in Berlin, and in my house, of course.

“But you must come and see my bachelor-quarters, too,” he said, when we were discussing this question. “It is true, there is not much to see

there—everything is very simple here—in Paris, I might have shown you something, and in Naples, too. Still, I hope it may interest you.”

Of course it did, of course I was very eager to see his home—this absolutely faithful picture of the habits and tastes of its possessor, which would give me many hints for the future arrangement of our own house. I proposed to go at once.

But he made difficulties. His “Nenne” would never forgive him if he came down upon her so unexpectedly; true, she was very eager to see her “big boy’s” betrothed, and would have come to see me long ago if it had not been for her rheumatism. But so unexpectedly——

But I laughed at him. We would give her time to put on a fresh cap, if she wanted to; but for the rest, a good house-keeper would always be ready for visitors. No, no, this time I would have my way. So we drove thither.

Feodor told me about his house-keeper—his “Nenne”—on the way. She was his old nurse, a German, whom his mother had taken to St. Petersburg (“although the Russian nurses are admirable,” he remarked in parenthesis), and who had taken care of him from the time he was born. Afterward, a martyr to rheumatism, she had returned to her own home; but when he settled in Berlin, in the autumn, he had sent for her—nay, he had fetched

her himself—to superintend his house-keeping. “For that,” he added, “she understands perfectly, and she is as good as gold in every way, with only two faults—that she absolutely worships her foster-child, and talks every one to death who comes near her. So look out for yourself, my love.”

I was not afraid ; on the contrary, I made up my mind to see her often, and get her to talk to me about him. She, who had known him from childhood—how many stories she must know of his boyhood, how I could learn to know him through her, and have the delight of hearing his praises from her lips. Oh, I was already fond of her, beforehand !

Königin Augusta Strasse, No. 19—I knew the address by heart. And he lived there in that handsome new house—but no newer and handsomer than the others—not good enough for him, by a long way ! His taste really was simple.

A servant in dark livery received us. The sallow skin, the prominent cheek-bones, and the piercing black eyes indicated the Russian ; and if I had had any doubt, the Russian words that Feodor whispered to him would have convinced me. He bent down almost to the ground, and, seizing the hem of my dress, pressed his lips to it and murmured, “Barina !”

“He is paying homage to you as his mistress,”

translated Feodor. "It is my faithful Wassili, who has accompanied me in all my wanderings. I think we will take him as courier on our journey, for he is invaluable in such a position. He has picked up enough of all languages to make himself understood—though he knows less German than anything. And here are two other subjects who wish to pay homage to you—two old acquaintances—here Diana, Juno, make your best bow!"

They were the two beautiful greyhounds which I had admired at the sea-side ("whom I have to thank for your noticing me at all," he whispered, maliciously). They lay down caressingly at his feet, then they sprang up and licked our hands.

"That is good," I cried, stroking them; "you do it better than my old bear Zokko, who growls at your master, through silly jealousy. You must come and see him some time, and teach him manners, will you?"

In the mean time Feodor had conducted me across the stone mosaic floor of the hall to the salon. It was simply furnished—a *chambre garnie*, as Feodor rather contemptuously remarked. He had only added a few objects of art, such as a genuine Claude Lorraine, which adorned the broad wall—a magnificent landscape, with all the charm of coloring of the French school. And then the arrangement (disarrangement, perhaps, is a better

word) was his ; this general confusion of furniture, arranged more with a view to comfort than beauty. Well, I would try to unite the two in his rooms. For we meant to refurnish the right wing of my house, in which my parents' apartments were situated, and which had hitherto been left untouched. I was looking forward with great pleasure to choosing and arranging everything with him.

"This is my smoking-room," he said, pointing to a portière. "I furnished that myself ; but for a young lady——"

He looked at me with a mischievous smile, but I answered his thought, as I quickly entered the room.

"Your wife will have to get accustomed to the odor of the Virginian weed," I said, playfully, looking back at him.

It was a charming room, furnished in Oriental style : low divans along the walls, covered with Persian carpets, and beside them little tables bearing elegant smoking apparatus ; on a sort of Japanese buffet were several nargiles, magnificent goblets, and a real Chinese coffee-service.

I looked at all this with as much pleasure as if I had never seen the like, and Feodor was as pleased with my admiration as a school-boy displaying his possessions. Suddenly my eyes fell on some glass cases which stood in a niche on an artistically

wrought ebony table ; gold and silver coins gleamed out from them.

"Ah, that is Dr. Ranzoff's American collection of coins !" I cried, in surprise. I recognized them at once, for I had had them in the house for several days. "How did they come here?" I inquired, still looking at the beautiful pieces, which were thrown up so admirably from their background of black velvet.

"I—I bought them."

There was something in the tone in which he spoke these simple words which caused me to look up, and I was amazed to see Feodor's face deeply flushed. I had already observed that he could blush like a girl, from embarrassment as well as from anger ; but what occasion for it was there now ?

I was just going to ask him, when the portière was pushed aside, and the house-keeper, Frau Fiedler, who had been notified, rustled in.

Yes, rustled, for she would not appear except in grand toilet—a black silk dress, an old-fashioned shining taffeta, falling in rich folds, which, in these days of narrow garments, gave the old lady an unusual breadth and circumference.

But how becoming the dress was, with its broad lace collar, and how nice the white mull cap looked, framing in the good-natured red face ! The bow of

broad mull which fastened the cap bore witness to the skill and careful arrangement of the owner—for there is hardly an article of the feminine toilet which gives so just a measure of the neatness and daintiness of its wearer as the bow on the bonnet or cap. This was fresh and airy as if it had just come out of the hands of the modiste. If I had been looking for a house-keeper, and she had offered her services, I should have engaged her on the spot.

I stopped her embarrassed courtesy by holding out my hand, which she kissed heartily, while her eyes filled with tears.

"The bride of my dear boy—my master, I would say," she sobbed, putting her handkerchief, which she held exactly in the middle, between the thumb and the middle finger, to her eyes. "How glad I am! I would have come to pay my respects to the gracious Fräulein long ago, with your gracious permission, if it had not been for my stupid feet and that horrid rheumatism. But now the gracious Fräulein has come herself, and she is so sweet—yes, any one can see that," she said, turning to Feodor, who stood looking on with a smile, as if he were enjoying a comedy. "Yes, that is easy enough to see; she is good and clever, too—that you can see in her eyes! Yes, you see, my dear, I have long wished it might be so, for this bachelor-life is not good for a man, it spoils the best of them; and to think I should live

to see it, and such a nice young lady, too, not at all proud——”

The last words were in allusion to my efforts to make her sit down (for we had returned to the salon), and to put a cushion under her feet in the big felt shoes.

“Thank you, thank you a thousand times, my dear young lady—ah, if it wasn't for my feet and my old bones! Up there in Russia” (she pointed to Feodor, as if he represented the country) “it began, and I can't get rid of it, though he, dear boy, has sent me to all the baths in the world—only last summer, to a cold-water cure. But that didn't do me so much good as the warm baths, and then the food—for you see, my dear, it is eating and drinking that keeps body and soul together, I always say, and when one takes a cold cure like that and gets nothing fit to eat, for in the evening they never had anything but cold meat, though I have nothing to say against that, though it is a great mistake to think it is so much cheaper, but in such a cure that takes hold of a person so, that is no use, and you have to spend a mint of money for it, when you could get for the same amount a good dinner and supper, with a droschky or two thrown in—so you can understand that that sort of thing won't set one on one's legs again!”

I thought it was very evident, and I had the

muscles of my face sufficiently under control—notwithstanding Feodor's side-glance—to assure her of it very gravely.

The good woman then began to discourse on the *cuisine*, and brought out the experience she had had in various countries. "For you see, my dear, besides my own Saxon way of cooking I have learned the Vienna way, too, which is by no means to be despised (fried chicken is one of the master's favorite dishes, I will tell you that now), and then the Russian way, in which one can learn a great deal, for instance, about sweet preserves, and the *biroschki*—" "Pirogeki," corrected Feodor. "Oh, yes, the Russian pronunciation—I never could get that very well," laughed the old woman—"and, thank heaven, I don't need it any more now, for Wassili can understand me, and the others speak a reasonable language, and not that twisted, heathenish tongue, in which everything is turned upside down——"

The said Wassili interrupted her stream of talk by bringing in a visiting-card.

My betrothed's face darkened. That is Ranzoff, I thought, casting a glance at the card.

I was not mistaken.

"Excuse yourself," I whispered, as I saw his face.

"I cannot." He crushed the card hastily in his hand. "He has come to say good-by—you will

excuse me for a few minutes. In the dining-room ! " he said to the servant, and left the room.

" Well, now, that is very convenient," said Frau Fiedler ; " gentlemen don't like to hear about house-keeping affairs, I know that, but an engaged young lady is always interested in them."

I took good care not to contradict her, and I hope the little white lie may not be reckoned against me.

" There are the Russian preserves," she continued, " they certainly do understand that sort of thing to a T. Yes "—she suddenly put both hands on the arms of her chair to raise herself—" you must just have a look at them ! Besides, the pantry downstairs—you are sure to be interested in that, aren't you ? "

" But it is so hard for you to walk," I urged.

" Oh, bah, the kitchen and pantry are only a few steps down in the basement, and upstairs—I will show you that afterward "—and she waddled out of the room, leaning on my arm.

She showed me her beautifully kept kitchen, and the pantry with its rows of preserve-jars, among them currants and gooseberries done in the Russian fashion, every berry being perfectly round and transparent. I admired everything to her heart's content, and she imparted a number of receipts to me, of which, to my shame be it said, I have not retained a single one.

"But now you must see how I get upstairs," she continued, when we had returned to the ground floor.

"Do you see this little elevator? That, my dear boy—my master, I would say—had made on purpose for me, so I could get up and down stairs without any trouble. What do you say to it?"

I said nothing, but my eyes filled with tears as I saw how touchingly Feodor cared for his old nurse—he, a man, who is much less apt to think of such things! Oh, he was much better than I! My old Thomas, who was already getting rather infirm, was not nearly so well off with me. But I was glad that in this respect, also, I could look up to him, and I would learn of him and would try to be like him.

The old woman, in the mean time, had seated herself in the chair, which, by a simple arrangement, was drawn up with the aid of a servant. I declined to undertake this journey through the air and hurried upstairs to the upper story, where Frau Fiedler was already waiting for me.

"You see how quickly that goes," she said, proudly, "and it is quite safe, too. At first I was always afraid to go in the thing, but it is quite safe. And what would become of the house-keeping, if I could not go up and down whenever I like? We should be swindled and cheated out of our very skins by the servants."

Then she took me into her room, a perfect gem of a house-keeper's room, with cushions, footstools and tidies and blossoming plants—*his* gift, of course—in the window.

"Here is my bedroom close by," she continued, "and there is the wardrobe-room, where I was busy packing when you came."

"Packing?" I said, in surprise. "Who is going away?"

"Oh, no one; but the house is to be given up at the new year, and so I have begun to pack a little already."

I was curious enough to go to the open door and look in.

"Ah," she said, apologetically, "it is in fine disorder, isn't it—all the drawers open—but what will you have? The Herr has such a lot of stuff, and I am picking out the things he doesn't need, to send them away or to give them to some one——"

I was already in the room. A piece of beautiful blue satin had attracted my attention—that could not belong to a gentleman's wardrobe.

I picked it up in spite of the old woman's remonstrances. It was a waistcoat.

"A sky-blue waistcoat!" I cried—"this belongs to Herr von Amstetten——"

But I did not finish my sentence, for, scattered about on the chairs, I found similar garments in

various colors ; cherry, sea-green, *mille-fleurs* on a white ground, rose-color embroidered with gold—all of magnificent material—but for waistcoats !

“ They are pretty, aren't they ? ” laughed the old woman, “ and it is a pity the Herr doesn't wear them ! They are a little too bright, to be sure. When I asked him about them once, he said they were not to be worn ; they were souvenirs of all the dresses he had given away. He had kept enough of each to make a vest—only think, what extravagance for nothing at all. But I could tell you of dozens of such whims. Like that time in London, when he first went there. He was to be a merchant, but he had no taste for it. And in London, he wrote, the people were so pious that on Sundays they did nothing but go to church all day ; and because he couldn't do that—may God forgive him for it !—he went to Paris every Saturday—just fancy it !—and did not come back till Monday ! I suppose Paris is close by, about as far off as Potsdam, where people often go to spend Sunday—but to go every week ! Nay, nay, he is not economical ; I will tell you that in confidence, my dear—whether it is rubles or thalers—or pounds—that is what they have in London, isn't it ?—it is all the same to him. He was always so when the blessed baroness was alive. ‘ Katharine,’ she used to say—that is my name—‘ Katharine, take this to

the post-office, and you can give me the receipt afterward.' She never needed to say more than that; I always understood her, and I never let it pass my lips. Yes, boys will be boys. But he has got a heart of true, pure gold, I tell you; and, now he is going to be married, everything will come right."

The good woman might have chattered on a long time without interruption, for I was quite lost in contemplation of the beautiful stuffs, whose origin had been so innocently imparted to me. Had I not seen such a sea-green dress somewhere? on the Minelli? Oh, the torture of having such unpleasant visions forever invading my paradise!

Where was Feodor now? Why did he not come to me? I begged Frau Fiedler to tell him that I wanted to go home.

But there he was. How he sprang up the stairs, like an impetuous boy! I felt my resentment melting away.

"I have been away a long time—pardon me! What, are you really angry?" He held me by both hands and looked searchingly into my eyes.

"I thought Frau Fiedler would keep you entertained. But you look really tired. Will you have a glass of wine?"

I declined, and we went down-stairs together, his arm thrown around me, so that I scarcely touched

the steps. I felt as a mother does who feels it her duty to punish her naughty child, and yet has an irresistible desire to kiss him.

"And now, I must beg you to go into the salon again," he went on. "That wretched Ranzoff is still there ; expects to start to-morrow—for Boston, you know. He was going to see you to say good-by, and I thought you would rather see him here and have done with it. It will be the quickest way," he added, in a low tone, for we were just going in the door.

Yes, it was short and formal enough. Dr. Ranzoff, in a new suit from head to foot, uttered his farewell speech in somewhat the same tone he might employ for his lectures across the water. Here, it was : "Gracious Fräulein—awfully sorry—long separation—always be friends—" There, it would be : "Ladies and gentlemen—great pleasure—see you again after so long a time—friendly reception—" I could hear him rounding his periods now.

Then a warm kiss on my hand and he was gone.

"I wish him a pleasant journey, with all my heart," said Feodor, evidently breathing more freely. I shared the feeling and joined heartily in his wish. What the two had been discussing about so long, I did not then inquire.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE day appointed for my wedding drew nearer and nearer. In the night, when I awoke, the thought seemed to take shape and stand before me, now, full of alluring charm ; then, of awful mystery. I gazed at it, and my heart began to beat faster and faster, till it almost took my breath away. When I fell asleep I dreamed of it, generally painful, terrifying dreams : they were waiting for me, and I could not get ready ; first, I lost my bridal-wreath, and then the wedding-ring, and when, at last, I stood at the altar I discovered that, instead of my white dress, I had put on a black one, and then I would wake with drops of anguish standing on my brow.

But it was light, it was day—one day nearer to the longed-for goal. Before the blissful present the dark visions of the night vanished. And then I had so much to do, so much to arrange, so many purchases to make—and all with *him* ! His presence lent a charm even to the dullest business, and our opinions and our tastes harmonized so perfectly ; or did I persuade myself that I liked everything that

he liked or chose? Ah, I had hardly an opinion or a will of my own now! What had he done to me? He had made a yielding, timid, submissive creature of me, but a happy one!

The civil marriage took place three days before the religious one. A civil marriage! How much I had heard about it at the time of its introduction! How many men had demonstrated that the religious ceremony was quite superfluous, that the blessing spoken by the clergyman over a young couple had no significance, that a thousand marriages blessed in this manner were unhappy, while a thousand others had found happiness and prosperity without it. All this had been discussed before me by clever men, and I had agreed with them, and had felt very superior in the consciousness of my freedom from prejudice.

And now, when the question came up before me in a practical form, how different it seemed to me! I dispense with the religious ceremony, with the clergyman's blessing? Not for the world! Though I had neither father nor mother to lay their hands upon my head in blessing, the priest should do it, at any rate. I had never been much of a churchgoer. One so seldom hears a sermon, nowadays, to which one can heartily say amen. And the pastor of the parish to which I belonged was a particularly narrow-minded, insignificant man, who complained

every Sunday from the chancel that the church was so badly filled. So I had contented myself with contributing largely to his support. I was content with that, and perhaps he was, too.

But now that he was going to pronounce a blessing over me, I went to church, seated myself where he could not help seeing me, and looked at him attentively all through the sermon. That seems like hypocrisy, doesn't it? But I wished to get nearer to him; wished that his marriage discourse might be dictated by a friendly personal feeling, that he might say to me what I once heard a clergyman say to a bride: "This young bride, whom I have so often rejoiced to see lingering in this holy place in quiet devotion—" It was childish of me, no doubt, but—are there not many brides who share this feeling?

Even the civil marriage did not seem so utterly prosaic to me as I had expected. It is true, there was nothing especially dignified about the office and the official. The latter seemed to me even absurd, because he read the usual form in an especially bland manner, perhaps on account of the large sum which we laid down for the poor. But this formula, no matter how or by whom spoken, was sufficient to make me *his* wife before the law. This thought overpowered all others. If the skies were to fall and the earth opened now I should die as his wife,

and we should be forever united in the world beyond. In the other world ! Is it not strange how firmly one believes in this other world and the reunion there, when one faces the possibility of a separation from those dear to us ?

Slowly, thoughtfully, I left the mayor's office on the arm of my cousin Emile, while his mother followed with Feodor. The young Kreis-Gerichts-Assessor had been in Berlin for a short time ; he had put on his most solemn aspect for the occasion, but his blooming countenance and his increased *embon-point* gave me the soothing conviction that my marriage with another had not broken his heart.

Down-stairs, little Hans, my groom, was standing by the carriage-door, and as I got in he asked, his face taking on a deeper red than usual, while his mouth was stretched in a half-suppressed grin :

"Where will the gracious Frau drive next ?"

I blushed like a school-girl who is addressed as "Fräulein" by her teacher for the first time after her confirmation. But the title of "Frau," heard for the first time, is still more delightful. I am sure Hans must have studied up his speech for days, and he should have a good *douceur* for it.

At last the great day came, the eighteenth of December. The marriage was to take place at four o'clock in the afternoon ; in this I had had my own way, against the wish of my betrothed, who had

pleaded for twelve o'clock. But a festival in broad daylight and in December, when it is not clear and bright, but dark and gloomy, seemed intolerable to me. No ; we would have the warm, brilliant gas-light instead.

The dinner had been arranged to take place at my aunt's house, who fulfilled her duties as mother of the bride to the best of her ability, and we were to set off by the evening train. We were only going to Dresden that day, but then we should go on to Rome, where we were to spend the Christmas holidays. Dresden, Rome—I wondered at myself now for having ever disputed with Feodor about our wedding-journey ; now it seemed quite the same thing to me whether I went with him to Italy or to Siberia. I could say, with poor *Lenore* : " With him, with him is bliss, and without him is hell ! "

I had risen early. My happiness, my emotion had prevented my sleeping well. I lighted the candle on my toilet-table and knelt down on the soft carpet before my little white bed to pray.

I had never prayed so heartily, so fervently in my life before. It is said that sorrow teaches us to pray, but I think happiness is a better teacher. One is so penetrated by the conviction that it is through no merit of one's own that happiness has come that one feels the urgent necessity of thanking Him from whom all blessings come. At least I found it so.

Then I went softly across to my work-room, in order not to wake Mrs. Tremlett, who slept in the next room. I had made up my mind that to-day, the last day of my maiden existence, I would pour out my heart once more in my "Blue-Book," that silent friend of mine, and then bring it to an end. Afterward I should not need this confidant any more; Feodor would then be my best and my only confidant, from whom I should have no secrets. No; I promised myself to-day that I would never keep anything secret from him, that my heart and my soul should ever be like an open book to him.

And he should read my "Blue-Book," also. On some rainy evening during our journey, perhaps, when I perceived a slight expression of weariness about his mouth, such as I had already observed sometimes, I would bring it out and show him in black and white how I had loved him from the very first moment he had come into my life. And then he would read the earlier pages also, the memories of my childhood and my girlhood, and he would see how I had suffered from my ugliness and would—ah, what would he say or do? I could not imagine, and I went to the glass to see whether to-day, on my wedding-day, I could not win a more favorable judgment of me from myself.

Ah, no! It is a mistake to say the exterior is

only a mirror of the inner man. In this small, pale face was displayed nothing of that brilliant happiness that filled my soul—only the eyes shone with a strange brightness. I was really a little *zingara*, a gypsy, as he had playfully called me the other day. It was a few evenings before, when I had taken heart of grace and imparted to him my discovery of those horrid waistcoats. How he laughed, the horrid man, how he teased me about my jealousy and crowded over me for it !

“For my love is jealous, too,” he whispered. “I am jealous of all the people who have swarmed about you on easy terms, as if they were your equals ; I am jealous of your big black Zokko, on whose neck you put your charming little feet. Jealousy belongs to love as shadow to light.” And then he had bent over me, and his brown curls, which were always falling where they should not, had touched my forehead, and I shivered at the touch. Oh, how delightful he was, this great, tall man, and could it be possible for any one to be angry with him for more than five minutes ?

And there—it was his step, no, his spring upon the stairs ! I quickly shut my “Blue-Book,” and he draws me trembling to his broad breast, calls me his sweet little wife, and kisses my pale cheeks till they flame. Oh, am I not the happiest creature under the sun ?



CHAPTER XIX.

I HAD intended to preserve my full consciousness during that sacred hour that brought to me the deepest happiness of my life, the union with my beloved—but I could not. The veil, whose airy folds floated around me, seemed to wrap all about me in a light mist. I saw my good Mrs. Tremlett—who was to return to her English home in a few days—in *pensee* satin and in tears; I saw my aunt, radiant beneath the consciousness of her dignity and the emeralds which we had presented her; I saw my cousin Emile in his official costume, in which he had passed his examination for Kreis-Gerichts-Assessor; I saw, too, the best man, Colonel von K——, a friend of my bridegroom—saw the two bridesmaids, one of whom was Mimi Feldern, Emile's old flame; then I heard the solemn sound of the bells, the powerful tones of the organ, which sounded above us; I felt that I was walking up the flower-strewn aisle of the church, on Feodor's arm,

who half-carried rather than led me—but all this only made an impression on my senses, my mind could not realize it.

The clergyman's voice was the first thing to bring me back to consciousness, and I uttered my "yes" with my head raised proudly, and with full appreciation of its meaning. Every one should hear it, and the unseen witnesses who made this place holy should bear testimony that I gave myself to this man with all my heart and soul, for joy or for sorrow, for time and for eternity, and that he promised the same to me.

Then came the congratulations of my friends, and soon I found myself sitting by his side at the brilliant table which my aunt had got up for us. The clergyman sat on the other side of me, and I remember how disgusted I felt that he should display such an extraordinarily good appetite. Then came the toasts and the speeches, of which I only heard Feodor's speech of thanks; he spoke so beautifully, with so much tact, that I pressed his hand in secret to show my appreciation. And all the time my heart beat so violently beneath my bridal robe that, to my aunt's despair, I could not touch a morsel, and was glad when Mrs. Tremlett gave the signal for rising, and I could leave the room with her and go home to change my dress for my journey.

When Feodor put me into the carriage, he gave me a long, steady look deep into my eyes, and whispered, "My wife!" How long, since then, have I lived on these words—on the tender tones of his voice!





CHAPTER XX.

My dear little dressing-room ! The fire was crackling gayly in the fireplace, the flickering flames reflected back from the shining marble columns ; the Psyche mirror opposite, brilliantly lighted by the bronze candelabra, gave back my figure as I lay back in the luxurious low chair, still robed in the heavy, creamy silk and the airy lace. My cheeks were flushed with excitement, and I smiled at myself, for—yes, happiness is a beautifier !

I had begged my good Tremlett to leave me alone for half an hour. It was still early, and I could put on my travelling dress in a few minutes. There it lay, the pretty, prune-colored dress that Feodor had chosen for me himself (he thought the warm color would be becoming to me) ; beside it, the velvet bonnet of the same color, the magnificent fur cloak which he had had sent from St. Petersburg for me—I had only to slip into them.

How good he was—how kind all my friends and acquaintances were ! The table and the mantel-



I HAD BEGGED MY GOOD TREMLETT TO LEAVE ME ALONE FOR HALF AN HOUR.

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piece were covered with flowers ; on the sofa lay packages, still unopened ; on the little marble table beside me were letters that had come to-day during my absence.

I looked over them ; that was a congratulation, probably from a poor *protégé* ; this, the unaccustomed writing of a little god-child ; here, the scrawl of an artist I had befriended. But this one ; actually, this was Dr. Ranzoff's handwriting ! Could he be writing from America already ? He had only been there about three weeks. But no, the letter bore the post-mark "Berlin." Nevertheless, it was certainly from him ; no one else made that peculiar *F*, beginning from below and enclosing the "Fräulein" in one long flourish.

Fräulein ! A feeling came over me as if he had written to a dead person. Fräulein Sarneck was no more ; Frau von Amstetten—how much prettier that sounded !

But, at any rate, it was kind of him to take the trouble to send the letter to some acquaintance here, so it might reach me at just the right time. And it had come at the right time, just now when I was at peace with all the world, even with him, who had been so disagreeable to me lately—

But this was not a simple note of congratulation, it was a thick letter of several sheets. My curiosity was aroused, and I cut the envelope—it contained

a written sheet, and a second sealed letter without any superscription.

The letter was dated at Boston, and contained the following words :

" My dear Fräulein Sarneck—I was obliged to leave Europe without seeing you alone again. But I bore away with me a secret which concerns you and me and a third person, a man who is very near to you. You know whom I mean. This secret weighs upon me ; I feel that I must confide it to you, and so I have written it down in the enclosed letter.

" But, before you open it, you must swear to me that you will never make the slightest allusion to what I have confided to you, to any one—least of all to him whom it chiefly concerns.

" If you open this letter, you will have given this promise, and I know you will keep it as faithfully as if you had given your solemn oath to me in person. If you are unwilling to accept these terms, throw the letter into the fire unread."

Such were the words written on the smooth sheet in the rather flourishing but elegant handwriting of Dr. Ranzoff. I looked at them in astonishment ; I felt that something terrible was hanging over me. This, then, was the secret that I had felt was between these two men, which had so often made me uneasy, although I had reassured myself by saying

that it was only jealousy on the part of both of them ; and now I was to learn the truth——

Or should I put it aside ? Should I throw the fatal letter into the fire unread ? Something within me urged me to do it ; I had promised myself never to have a secret from my husband ; and now, should the very first act of my married life be——

But it was no secret to *him* ! He knew about it, and had concealed it from me ! It was not right of him. To be sure, it might be nothing of importance—some nonsense or other. Oh, the man who wrote this letter did not know how much I loved Feodor ! I would forgive him anything in the past, I only demanded the future for myself. What had I to do with his past, with the time before he knew me ? It would be absurd to make a disturbance about that.

But ought I to learn through another a secret that he himself had kept from me ? No, I could not do that. I held the mysterious letter over the flames—the heat scorched my fingers, and I drew it back.

Oh, if the letter I held then had only slipped out of my hands, and the forked flames had consumed it as they had done the innocent flowers so long before ! But my fingers held it tight, and an evil spirit whispered to me : “It is the truth which is

written there, and one must be able to learn the truth and to bear it."

Did not the serpent whisper similar words to the reluctant Eve?

And then my fingers slipped gently under the flap of the envelope, which was only sealed at the very tip, as if the writer wished to make the opening easy. One little drop of gum-arabic the guardian of a secret on which depended the happiness or unhappiness of two lives! Oh, why was it not sealed with seven seals, and then, perhaps, I should have hesitated——

But I had already flung the envelope into the fire, the closely written sheet lay in my hand, my burning eyes rested on the elegant characters, and, greedily devouring the opening lines, sought for the important revelation—the secret.

The first lines referred to his love, his "despised, rejected love." My lips curled disdainfully; if I had ever believed in his love, I felt certain now that it had never existed, that whatever feeling he had experienced for me did not deserve that sacred name. No, it was only wounded vanity that I could prefer another——

Quite right, he acknowledged as much himself. "As long as I could believe," he wrote, "that no other would win you, as you yourself assured me, I could bear my fate with resignation.

“ ‘ One gazes not at the stars with longing,
One rejoices only in their light ; ’

“ I looked up to my star with reverence, and contented myself with rejoicing in its beams from afar.

“ Then Herr von Amstetten came to Berlin. I met him at the Artists' Club, met him often, and became quite intimate with him. Every one admired him, men and women alike. Is it not natural that a poor mortal who makes his way with difficulty through the world, should be a little envious of such an arrogant demigod, upon whom all the good things of life were showered in abundance? You see, I do not gloss over my feelings—we two used always to be very frank with one another.

“ One evening he gave a supper in his house. It was only a small company, but the dishes were very *recherché*, the wines were excellent. Praises were showered upon the host, who knew so well how to entertain his guests ; they spoke, also, of his success in everything ; of how easy it was to win a woman's heart, etc. I must say he behaved like a gentleman, and did not boast of his triumphs, as another man might have done.”

I dropped the letter—I felt that it was unworthy of me to read further. If the writer had stood before me and spoken such words, I should have indignantly bidden him be silent. “ He behaved like a gentleman—” Of course he did ! And

what did Ranzoff know about gentlemen? I reluctantly turned the page to see if the letter was much longer.

My eyes fell upon my own name—and I read on :

“When the guests had all gone, I stayed behind alone with Herr von Amstetten. I wanted to speak to him about my collection of American coins, which he wished to purchase. We lighted fresh cigars, he sent for more wine, and we got into conversation, and returned to the subject of women’s hearts.

“It was natural that my thoughts should turn to you, Fräulein Bella. You were the only woman who had occupied my thoughts for a long time. I could not refrain from making a comparison between my monotheism and the polytheism of my host. In the course of the conversation, I remarked that there was *one* woman, here in Berlin, who would not be so easily won, a Vesta against whom all efforts proved vain.

“He laughed, declared all vestals were humbugs, and quoted the old phrase about the ‘right man.’ I protested ; we grew eager ; the wine helped on the discussion ; in short, I cried out that I would wager my collection of coins that he would not succeed in winning you.

“You see, I felt so sure of my cause. Only a short time before you had told me that even your dearest friend would never be more to you than a

friend. So I hoped to humble the arrogance of this Russian, and avenge your sex through you.

"Herr von Amstetten took the wager. We agreed that I should introduce him to you, and that if he did not present you to me as his betrothed one week from the day he first met you, he would lose his bet. Then he would buy the collection of coins and pay for it double the price I asked for it—otherwise, however, he would get it for nothing."

Again the letter dropped from my hand. I stared fixedly at the lines. The smooth, ordinary letters, written with common ink, yet seemed to scorch my eyes as if they were written in fire. But were not death-warrants also written with ordinary ink in ordinary handwriting?

I read on :

"The rest you know. Herr von Amstetten came, saw, and conquered. One week, precisely one week, after I had introduced 'my friend' to you, he presented you to me and every one else as his betrothed !

"Of course, we had agreed that the secret should be kept between us two, and the world should never learn that the proud Fräulein Sarneck had been the prize of a wager. But I knew it, and I confess the thought was at first balm to the wounds which you had inflicted upon me. You had scorned my faith-

ful, enduring love. Was it not a just punishment that you should now bestow your love where only pretended affection was given you in return? But after I had left you, after the sea had separated us, and my feelings grew calmer, I was tormented by the thought that I had betrayed you, and I determined to disclose everything to you. I believe that I am doing no wrong in this. The promise of silence was a wrong toward you. I hope this letter may reach you soon enough to prevent your taking the decisive step. Then I shall have saved you; I, whom you have scorned and rejected. Do not forget that!"

Forget it! Oh, if I only could! If I could only be as I was before I had read those horrible words! I flung the letter from me as I would a poisonous snake, but only to pick it up again the next moment. No one must see it, and I would not burn it. I must read it again, slowly, calmly; perhaps I should find——

What? That it was all a lie? Oh, foolish heart, will you not believe what is so clear and plain? Have you not asked yourself a hundred times why he, who was so admired, so worshipped, who found it easy to win all hearts, should have chosen you, who were so insignificant? Well, you know now why he did it, and you are vain and foolish enough not to believe the answer, humiliating though it

may be? No, no; cast away this vain self-exaltation, believe what you see, and then——

Ah, yes; what then? Then there was nothing left for me but to die.

To die? Oh, if I only could! If this horrible paper were only a venomous thing that carried death in its touch! But it only gave out a slow poison, which destroyed happiness, not life.

Only happiness. "Oh, Feodor!" I screamed aloud. Could it be possible that all his love, his passion for me, had been only a pretence? For the sake of a bet, a bet that would have been horribly absurd and in bad taste if it had not been so base, so infamous! To see and to conquer in eight days! That was why he had penetrated to my studio against my orders; that was why he had been so stormy, so passionate; for that day, that very hour, he must gain my consent in order to win his bet.

And he had gained it, he had won his wager. I had even seen the prize, the collection of coins in his room. That was the meaning of his embarrassment, then—of his sudden flush. Ah, well might he blush for his unworthiness, blush before his unsuspecting victim! But it had been only for a moment, otherwise he had carried out his *rôle* admirably. It is a pity that no one knew of the farce except that insignificant man in America—that he could not

boast of it to his friends here ! Oh, the shame of it, the disgrace !

I covered my burning face with my hands, but no tears came to relieve the torture of my heart.

The clock on the mantel-piece began to strike—the pretty little clock of Meissen china, which had been given to me when a child, with its gold bird, which hopped out of its cage and indicated the hour by the flapping of its wings.

I stared at it as if I beheld the dainty little thing for the first time. Five—six—seven—seven o'clock ! In an hour the train would leave which was to take us to Dresden. I must make haste and come to some decision, but what ? What could I do ? Oh, that the fatal letter had come twenty-four hours earlier ; then there was still time, but now—

What should I say to him when he came ? I could not tell him what had happened, could not explain to him why I hated him now as much as I had formerly loved him. Hate him—did I really ? Ah, even at this moment I felt that I was lying to myself as I said it—no, I did not hate him !

But I felt a bitter resentment of his treachery, a profound scorn of his levity—that boundless, inconceivable levity that could make the happiness of two persons depend on an infamous bet. Was such a thing conceivable ? Doubts of the truth of the letter began to stir within me ; he had made the bet

before he knew me—might not real affection have come afterward? But no, a beauty might have effected this change—but I! And had I not proof enough of his faults in this direction? The bouquets to Minelli and her companions, the story of the waistcoats, which he had laughed at but not denied—ah, no, I could not doubt!

And yet, and yet, I did not hate him. No, I pitied his lot as I did my own, and would gladly have spared him the pain of seeing me so utterly changed. He had expected to find a comfortable sort of wife in me, a wife who loved him, who would be easy to deceive, whom in time he could thrust aside, in order to enjoy his old freedom again, and now——

Oh, if I could only die—now, this minute! There, on the toilet-table, was still standing the bottle of chloroform which I had lately been using for tooth-ache. If I emptied the contents on this cambric handkerchief—my bridal-handkerchief!—and put it to my mouth, I should suffocate—a quick and painless death. And then he would come in and find me lying in the chair, still in my bridal-rob—dead—in my hand the fatal letter which would explain all.

Oh no! no! For then he would look on himself as my murderer—and that must never be! He must not see the letter!

But where could I hide it? I rose heavily, and went to my toilet-table. I felt as if all my limbs were paralyzed from long disuse. I could feel every step I took from my chair, by the fireplace, to the table by the window. There stood my jewel-case, a beautiful casket of ebony, with gold ornaments.

Where should I find the key to it? I put my hand to my forehead to collect my thoughts. How hard it was to recall anything of that time when I could think of other things besides—a far distant time, it seemed to me, remote as my merry, thoughtless childhood.

More from habit than from any clear recollection of the matter, I mechanically drew out the drawer of the toilet-table. Yes, there lay the little golden key, with the red ribbon. I always kept it in my purse when I travelled. The casket was not packed up yet, because the diamond brooch which fastened the knot of orange-blossoms at my breast was still to be put in.

I unlocked the box. Brilliant ornaments, pearls, and diamonds gleamed within. But I had nothing to do with them. I pressed a spring in the black velvet cover; it sprang out and displayed a secret drawer.

Here were hidden no costly treasures—only yellowing papers and dried flowers. They were flowers gathered in famous places, cards of celebrated

persons, a few poems of doubtful worth, which poor poets had addressed to me. Harmless, childish relics ! I could have laughed at them, if in the last half-hour I had not forgotten how to laugh. So I looked at them with a feeling of bitterness with which one recalls a happiness irrecoverably lost, and put that fatal paper in their place. I had a vague memory of words like these :

“ A dreadful secret I confide to thee,
Which, like the poison of that olden time,
Shatters the cup that holds it.”

It seemed to me almost an injustice toward the artistically wrought casket which had so faithfully kept my ornaments for me, my sparkling jewels, my costly treasures, to make it now the receptacle for this curse of my life.

I locked it carefully. Then among the numberless *flacons* on the toilet-table I found the bottle of chloroform, and put it on the marble table, beside the chair, into which I sank. Slowly and carefully I folded up my handkerchief—the beautiful point-lace which I had admired so much a short time before. It was damp—with the chloroform I should inhale many tears which had fallen upon it—tears of sacred emotion, tears of overflowing gratitude, such as I should never, never shed again.

I had stretched out my hand for the bottle, firmly, without a quiver.

There came a knock at the door.

It was Mrs. Tremlett, with my maid, who came to help me dress. Should I send them away? Lock the door? I felt incapable of rising, of taking a single step. The door opened, and it was not Mrs. Tremlett or Louise who came in, but it was *he* who softly put his head in, smiling and saying, "May I?"

I could not speak a word, nor move a muscle—mute, rigid, I remained lying back in my chair.

"Ella—*duschinka maja*, what is the matter? Not dressed yet? And so pale and cold? My God, what has happened?"

Oh, that soft voice, that was music to my ears; sweet pet names, that went straight to my heart—and it was all—all a lie! He bent down over me, and was going to put his arm round me. That roused me. I flung myself from him in horror and put out my hand to ward off his touch.

Shocked and dismayed, he stood before me in all his imposing height, and looked critically at me. I was now sitting upright in my chair, with wide-open eyes; the blood had rushed to my cheeks at his touch; my energetic defence had shown him that I was not ill. He perhaps read something like defiance in my face, for the furrow between his eyes slowly deepened, so that the bushy brows almost met, the nostrils began to quiver, and he whispered, in that

tone of distant thunder which always gave me a mingled feeling of fear and admiration : "What has happened ? What is the matter with you ? Can't you answer ?"

No, I could not. If my salvation had depended on it, I could not have spoken a word. I only stared at him, still holding out my hand to keep him off. Then, suddenly, a crimson flush dyed his face, he seized my outstretched hand, and, crushing it between his strong, white fingers, he hissed out between his clenched teeth—I can see them now as they shone out with dazzling whiteness below his dark mustache : "Will you speak, girl ?"

He had sometimes said, playfully, that he could crush my little hand in his. He did it now, in his suppressed wrath. It was the right hand, on which I wore the wedding-ring, and it was pressed sharply into my flesh. At any other time I should have screamed out with the pain ; but now the physical pain, added to my inward sufferings, was the drop which made my cup overflow. The cry died on my lips—without a word I sank back in my chair, unconscious.



CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN I came to myself I was undressed and lying in bed—in my little white bed in my own old room. This was the first thing that was clear to my mind, and it gave me a feeling of comfort. The white curtains were drawn back, and my glance fell on the opposite wall; on the black marble mantelpiece—the large mirror above it, the pictures of my parents on either side of it. Everything was just as usual; I had had a bad dream, a nightmare, but now it was all over—it was daylight again.

Daylight? No. The lamp was burning in the red globe that hung from the ceiling, and shed its dim light through the room. And there, a little behind me, so I had not at once perceived her, sat Mrs. Tremlett in the chair by my bed. Why was she sitting there? Why was she not in her own room in her bed? I looked at her more carefully. She seemed to be asleep. But why was she in my chair in my bedroom? I was not ill!

Suddenly I felt a pain in my right hand. I drew

it out from under the silk coverlet. Ah, a piece of white linen was wound round it. I pulled it off—the middle and ring fingers were red and swollen, and there, on the latter, the ring, the wedding-ring, was buried in the swollen flesh.

Now it all came back to me! The beneficent twilight which had enveloped my spirit gave way to the harsh light of full consciousness, and with it the heavy weight from which the swoon had mercifully relieved me sank down upon me again. The terrible ache in my heart awoke again, and made me forget my physical pain.

So I did not die! I was still alive, and I must live on—comfortless, hopeless—a prolonged, tortured existence!

I gazed out into the twilight with burning eyes. A shadow glided across the great mirror opposite me. What was it? Who could it be? Who dared come into my room at this hour?

Suddenly my heart stood still, only to beat more rapidly than before. Now I knew who it was who was walking noiselessly up and down, there, at the other end of the room, his tall shadow reflected in the glass.

Yes, it was *he*! How tall and spectre-like he looked in the dim light! And he was changed, too—or was it only his costume, in which I had never seen him before—the loose, black velvet jacket, a

sort of house-coat ? Well, he was at home here now—could he spend the night in his wedding-suit ?

I suppressed a slight cry at this recollection, and shut my eyes tight again. But my movement had wakened Mrs. Tremlett from her light slumber ; she bent over me as if to listen, and the next moment he, too, was at my side.

Carefully, like a cautious doctor, he laid his hand on mine and let his finger rest for a moment on my pulse. It was no wonder if he thought me feverish, for the pulse was quickened beneath his touch so that I almost thought I could hear it.

In fact, he said as much to Mrs. Tremlett. I learned from her whispered remarks that the doctor had been there ; that on recovering from the swoon I had fallen into a deep sleep, and that she had ascribed this peculiar condition to the chloroform which she had found beside me, and which she supposed I had imprudently used for an attack of toothache.

“If I could only explain how her finger got crushed,” I heard Mrs. Tremlett say. I held my breath, so curious was I to hear his answer. But he overlooked the question, and only said : “We must renew the arnica bandage—she has pulled it off, probably in the restlessness of the fever.”

Then he held my hand in his, and while Mrs. Tremlett had gone out—she went to get the arnica

—he touched my fingers with his lips, so softly, so tenderly! Did he feel how my fingers trembled? Ah, how happy I might have been if this horrible misery had not come upon me!

I let them put the bandage on without stirring. It was such a relief not to be obliged to talk; a short respite, in which he surrounded me with love and tenderness—even though it was only pretended love and tenderness, yet it was like balm to my soul!

“’Tis the dream that is our life,
And the waking is but death.”

Why, oh, why had the traitor not left me to my sweet mistake? I should have been happy in it! Though only for a short time, it is true—for as long as he considered it necessary to wear the mask.

For it was all a mask—a lie! Now he was playing the anxious husband for Mrs. Tremlett’s benefit—when we were alone he would throw off all constraint.

So spoke my sober reason, while my heart constantly defended him. I racked my poor brains to recall one moment when he had shown his true nature—cold, calculating, egotistical—to me; when his indifference, his sneers at my weakness had been apparent, but I found none. No, he had played his part admirably.

Ah, if I had only been beautiful! Might I not even now have hoped to win him? What power does not a young wife possess! What means are not at her command to fight against every influence which can rob her of her husband's heart! But her greatest power, her most effective weapon, is her beauty, and I, alas! possessed none—I must give up the struggle.

So I would put an end to this undignified situation as soon as possible. As soon as I was alone with him I would tell him——

What? What *could* I tell him? Three words, "Ranzoff—the wager," would have sufficed, but I had promised never to speak these words.

Had I really promised? Was I really bound? He, the traitor, had also promised to be silent, and yet he had spoken because, as he said, the promise to be silent was wrong. He would make good his first treachery through a second—the hypocrite! And should I copy such a breach of faith? Should I justify his sophistry in this manner? Never! No, only in case it should occur to Feodor himself that it was this offence of his that had come between us, only then could I confess the truth to him. And I felt as if he *must* think of it, his troubled conscience *must* bring it home to him. And then, when he knew all—ah, then we must consult together as to how we could loosen the fatal bond.

between us in such a manner as to be the least painful, and occasion the least scandal—for he would hate that as much as I should.

My heart sank within me at the horrible result at which I had arrived in my thoughts. And I lay there motionless with closed eyes, tortured by mental anguish, unable to lose myself for a moment in slumber, and heard hour after hour strike from the clock on the mantel-piece, heard the two watchers whispering by my bed, heard the household wake up gradually, the servants creeping about the corridors, heard carriages drive by on the street, and the bakers' and butchers' boys whistling the inevitable *Fatinitza* march. And I became conscious, with ever-increasing dread, that the eventful moment was approaching—that I could not keep it off much longer.

"You must go and rest for a few hours," said Feodor to Mrs. Tremlett, "or you will be ill yourself."

"But you?" she returned, in a low tone.

"I am not tired."

"Shall I send you Louise—I mean, *Fräulein Sarnneck's*—that is, Arabella's maid?" she inquired, getting confused over my name.

"No," was the calm, firm reply; "only send me a little breakfast. I will stay with my wife alone."

His wife! I could have shrieked out with pain

and pleasure. But I must not feel either pain or pleasure now—I must be calm and cool.

As one sometimes rushes headlong into something one has long dreaded, for which one is not at all prepared, forcing one's self to do at once what must be done sooner or later, so I sat up in bed suddenly, as soon as Mrs. Tremlett had left the room, and, looking straight at Feodor, said :

“ I am not ill.”

“ Ella ! ”

He sank down by my bed and tried to take my hand ; but I drew it back.

“ No ; I am not ill, and I will not pretend to be ill any longer. I do not understand how to deceive.”

That must touch him, that must give him the clew. But no ; he looked at me in surprise and then said, in such a tender, compassionate tone that I felt all my hardly attained self-control leaving me :

“ My poor child, you are feverish. Don't you know me—your Feodor, your husband ? But you have a right to be angry with me, to draw your hand away from me that I crushed so in my anger—brute and monster that I am—your poor, sweet, little hand that I love so much. Oh, what can I say to make you forgive me ? ”

“ Forgive that—that little physical pain—oh, that is nothing,” I cried, greatly excited. “ But—— ”

"But what, my sweet?"

No, he did not suspect. His questioning glance was so calm and unembarrassed, as if he were conscious of no wrong done to me. Only tender anxiety was to be read in it. What a finished actor he was!

He bent lower over me; his brown curls brushed my forehead—those dear, brown curls! Only yesterday I had thought to myself how I would kiss them some day when he was not noticing. Now it was too late.

"Ella!"

His eyes looked at me so anxiously, so imploringly—oh, how was it possible he could be so false?

"You have fever, my poor *duschinka*," he said, gently, as I remained mute and unmoved. "I can see it in your glittering eyes. I can feel it in your burning hand. The doctor——"

"No, you are mistaken, only"—I could not tell him that it was only his presence that put me into a fever. "Sit down in that chair there, and now listen to me."

He did as I asked him, but there was incredulity in his manner, as if he were obeying the will of a sick person who was not responsible for her actions, in order not to excite her.

I was obliged to keep repeating to myself that he

had married me for the sake of a bet, in order to find the cold, clear words which were necessary to convince him that I was in my full right mind, and what I said was my well-considered, irrevocable decision. But I could not help the trembling of my voice, so that the words seemed like delirium even to myself. "Feodor!" I meant to say "Herr von Amstetten," but I could not get the words to pass my lips. "The clergyman has bound us together—but we do not belong to each other. We—I did not count the cost of the step I took—we were only acquainted a week—do you remember that, exactly a week——"

Would not this give him an idea of the truth? But he only repeated, mechanically, "A week——"

"It was too short a time. I see it now, too late, unfortunately—and as I recognize it now, it is necessary—that—that—we should separate."

He stared at me with wide, horrified eyes. But he did not believe me. Naturally, he might have answered that after our engagement we had seen each other daily for nearly two months. But it did not occur to him to discuss the subject with me. I could see plainly that he considered my words only the outcome of delirium. His hand, cold with emotion, was laid on my brow, and he sighed deeply.

It was in vain to try to convince him that I was in my right mind, I felt that. Perhaps the doctor

would do it when he came again, as he probably would. My old doctor—he knew me and would believe what I said.

But he should not find me here, not in this situation! It was dreadful to be confined to my bed with *him* as my attendant—an interesting spectacle for every one who might choose to enter the room. No, I would not endure this any longer!

Again I sat up, and said, as calmly as I could: “I wish to get up. Will you have the goodness to ring for Louise? The bell is here by the bed.”

“Get up? My poor child, you must not do that.”

“I must, and will. I am not ill! I want my breakfast, and—and I will get up!”

These impetuous words were little calculated to convince him that I was not ill. He shook his head and said, in his decided manner, but in the mild tone that one uses with a sick person: “You must not get up until the doctor has been here, and then he can decide.”

Intolerable! For years I had been accustomed to do what I pleased, and now this man—this man who had made me his property by a disgraceful action—took upon himself to give me orders! All the defiance in my character, which had never before shown itself to him, was aroused; it brought the angry tears to my eyes, and I sobbed out, as I tried to choke them back: “You make me ill when you

prevent me from getting up—I will lie down again—on the sofa—but I will not stay here.”

“Very well, then, I will ring. Where will you lie down—on the divan here or in your dressing-room? It would be better in there, and then this room can be aired.”

Yes, it would be better there. In that room where I had lived through that horrible hour, I could find strength to say to him what I had to say.

He went silently into the dressing-room when Louise came in. I scarcely heard her sympathetic questions—I was listening to his movements in the other room. He moved about for a while, moving the furniture here and there, and then all was still. He must have been listening, too, for when I said to Louise: “There, now give me the lace for my head—no, not the white one, the black one,” he came back again to get me.

And how carefully he led me in! How comfortably he had arranged everything in that short time! I did not know that men had any talent in this direction. He had drawn the lounge up to the fireplace opposite the chair in which he had found me yesterday; between them stood the table, with my breakfast on it, and in the centre a fresh bouquet of lilies of the valley and violets. He had had the other flowers taken away; the odor was too strong. My travelling dress was put away, too, and the

boxes and parcels that had been standing about yesterday. It looked very comfortable and cosey.

A word of thanks was on my lips, when my eyes rested on my jewel-case, which stood on the toilet-table, where I had left it yesterday; and at the thought of what was concealed there all gratitude died out in my heart and on my lips.

Silently I suffered Feodor to lay me on the lounge, which he had piled up with all the cushions attainable. I only gave monosyllabic replies to his questions whether I was comfortable, what would I take for my breakfast—and I drank with difficulty a few sips of the tea which he had prepared for me himself with the greatest care. He, too, ate but little, and as his attempts to make me talk utterly failed, he also at length became silent.

That was our first breakfast together!

And what now?

I felt as if I were witnessing a tragedy in a theatre—I could not realize that I was playing the principal part in it myself—I knew that the piece must end tragically, and after each scene which put off the catastrophe I said to myself: "Now something will happen which will lead up to the final act."

Then a carriage drove up—the doctor's carriage, I knew it by the way the coachman cracked his whip. Now Feodor would be assured that I was not ill, that I was quite responsible.

The Medicinalrath Klotz was our old family physician, who had carried me through the measles and scarlet fever in my childhood. Then I used to laugh at his high, bald forehead and his red nose, which he used to rub with his finger when he made a joke, and when he trotted me on his knee I used to ask him why he did not let some new hair grow like papa's. Now his nose was still redder and his head had grown balder, but I did not laugh at him now ; I valued the old man—although he had grown garrulous with age—as a tried friend of the family. If I could have confided my trouble to any one, perhaps I should have chosen him. But I must bear it all alone, I could not allow any one to suspect what I was enduring, and, worse than all, I must play the part of the happy young wife before the world !

At any rate, at first, until I had come to some arrangement with Feodor. There he sat opposite me, looking at me silently, searchingly, as a watcher observes a patient. But he looked ill himself—so worn, so weary, with dark shadows under his eyes. I only perceived it now, when the cold gray morning light fell upon him, instead of the light of the night-lamp—which cast a rosy glow over everything.

It is a question whether even in life this rose-colored light is not better sometimes than the pitiless truth ! Would it not be more endurable to live with him as his wife only in name, than to be entirely separated

from him ? This question was stirring in my heart, and I scolded the weak, foolish thing which still loved so dearly the man who had so betrayed it !

In the mean time Louise had announced the doctor, and Feodor went to meet him. Probably he imparted his fears to him, for the old Medicinalrath, who usually, even in serious illnesses, entered the room with an encouraging smile, greeting the patient with a cheery "Well, what's the good news to-day ?" now looked quite thoughtful and felt my pulse with unusual care. After he had examined me in all directions his face brightened up, and, rubbing his red nose energetically, he said : "Your husband has been unnecessarily anxious ; you must not allow that, little Frau."

"I told my—" I was going to say "my betrothed," but it occurred to me that he was that no longer—my husband, but I could not say that now ! "I told Herr von Amstetten," I began again, "that I was quite well, but he will not believe it."

"Well, I call that a queer taste—insists upon having his young wife ill, at all hazards !" laughed the doctor. "I have never known that happen before—generally it is the other way—the young wives declare they are ill and the husbands won't believe it ! But with her"—here he looked at Feodor—"there is no fear of that—a plucky little thing she is—I have known her ever since she was born. She

has only one fault, she has got a will of her own ; she is an obstinate little thing, but that seems to be getting better now, since she has given up her pet whim of being an old maid. Yes, yes, child ; you know how you had a sore throat some years ago and how you blazed up when I comforted you by saying it would be all gone before it was time to be married. She was quite red with excitement—just as she is now, you see, Herr von Amstetten—as she explained to me that she would never marry, never ! I laughed at her, and had my own thoughts about it all the while ; I have lived a year or two, and I have seen every year how the hardest ice melts when the sun shines down on it, you see, and now it has melted in the middle of winter and a Russian has brought it about ! Well, sir, I congratulate you, for, in spite of everything, you might have done worse for yourself."

So chatted on the good old doctor, without perceiving how constrained we both were and that neither of us joined in with his merriment. Feodor's voice even sounded a little irritated as he said to the doctor, who was quietly taking a pinch of snuff :

"Then my wife is not really ill?"

"No more than you or I—only a slight nervous affection which—well, which may easily be explained by the unfortunate crushing of her fingers—she has bones like a little child, you see—and that

trouble with the chloroform. Will you have a pinch?" —holding out his snuffbox. "Ah, you don't take snuff—of course—young wives—hatchee!—don't like that sort of thing, though it is very wholesome—hatchee! Yes, it was the chloroform. Got it a little too close to your nose, eh? Thought you had more sense—beg your pardon—more prudence! But that is all over now, and as for that"—pointing to my hand—"a little arnica will soon cure that."

"And she can start on a journey to-day without any danger?" inquired Feodor, with a searching glance at me.

"If she likes, certainly."

Feodor's curt tone made the old doctor a little uncomfortable. He took leave of him rather formally, though he was very cordial with me.

And then—we were alone again.

Feodor came back from the door, whither he had accompanied the doctor, and, fixing his eyes on me, he came slowly toward me until at length he stood before me.

There was a painful look of suspense in his manner, in his parted lips, his slightly bent figure. He was waiting for an explanatory word, perhaps for a loving one—oh, how could it be possible that he should not guess at the explanation himself, he who knew how frightfully he had insulted me?

This thought disturbed the softened impression

which his evident emotion made upon me. I turned away from him. It was my mute reply to his mute question. He went to the window, looked out for a moment, and then came back to me.

But his manner was changed now. He had crossed his arms upon his breast as if he would shut up within him all his emotions ; his lips were tightly compressed. He scarcely opened them as he said :

" You must repeat to me what you said. I did not understand it."

Again there was a struggle in my breast, a sob in my throat. But I conquered it. I called up all my strength. I looked straight into the fire as I said :

" I said we must separate." They were my lips that spoke, but it was not my voice.

" Why ? "

" If you do not know yourself, I cannot tell you."

" That is nonsense—madness ! I cannot believe that my violence yesterday has offended you so bitterly. I begged then—I beg you now, for forgiveness—what more can I do ? But no, the change had come over you before ; my violence was the consequence of it. And you said, yourself, that it was not that—once more, I ask if you can explain yourself ? "

" I have already told you that I could not."

" Very well "—his eyes flashed angrily at me—
" then your words are without meaning, they are an

empty sound for me. I shall wait till you come to your senses. It is true, I am not patient by nature"—I saw how his hands were clinched in the endeavor to restrain his passion—"but I will be patient till you give me a satisfactory explanation, or till you perceive that—some frightful mistake has clouded your mind. Besides, I have no desire to give cause for scandal to the world."

He walked rapidly up and down before me two or three times, and then he said, more calmly :

"Are you really able to travel to-day?"

I answered in the affirmative.

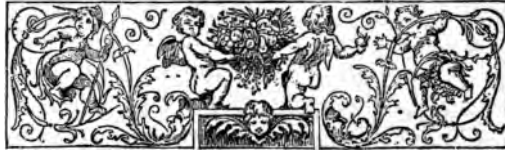
"Then I will tell Wassili. It is only three hours to Dresden. He will look after everything."





BOOK THIRD.

HE AND SHE.



CHAPTER XXII.

So it was settled. We set off on our journey—our wedding-journey !

When I look back upon it, it all seems to me like a confused dream, in which the persons and the places changed and only we ourselves remained the same. But, at the same time, it was a heavy, oppressive dream ; through all its brilliant visions there was always this feeling of a heavy weight lying upon the heart, of something dreadful that was going to happen and which we could not escape—only that in this case the dream was reality and the catastrophe was not about to happen, but had already taken place and followed me as faithfully as my shadow.

We sat opposite each other in the well-warmed coupé, he with his newspaper, I with my book. I could not say what book it was ; it was all the same to me whether it was the first or the second volume of a novel, whether I read to-day the continuation of a book I had begun yesterday or whether I had

taken up a new one. What did I care for the fate and the love-affairs of these make-believe persons? My own fate and my own love-sorrows were enough for me.

At every large station Wassili came to the door of the carriage and asked respectfully if the gracious Frau desired anything. But the gracious Frau seldom had any orders to give. Her husband thought of everything; he wrapped her up in robes and furs, he offered her refreshments, pointed out to her anything worthy of notice—without question, he was a very agreeable travelling companion.

The young wife thanked him conscientiously for every little service, for every attention; she thought of his comfort, too—reminded him occasionally that she had no objection to a good cigar, and insisted upon having the window open because she knew he liked the fresh air, although she was afraid of it.

So the couple became in time very attentive and polite travelling companions. Politeness is no doubt the best substitute for affection. But the continual *solitude à deux* became burdensome at last; the young wife suggested that they should not always take the whole coupé, that she did not object to sharing it with others. Of course, she did not say the presence of strangers was a relief to her, but she could pretend to herself that it was their presence which prevented a greater freedom of inter-

course with her husband, and it did her good that strangers should see how attentive he was to her, and they should think her happy.

So I leaned back, day after day, on the cushions of the carriage, listless and uninterested. When Feodor was not observing me, I looked at him ; as soon as his eyes rested on me I cast mine down on my book.

Once—the weather had cleared, it had grown colder and the sun was shining brightly on the snow—he had fallen asleep. Then I could let my eyes rest on his face to my heart's content—a painfully sweet pleasure ! But the light might wake him—I carefully drew the curtain over the window and laid the fur robe gently over his knees.

How handsome he was ! If I could have painted his portrait, I think I should have been successful. The closed eyes gave a peaceful look to his face that was new to me—but he looked pale—or was it only the light shining through the blue curtain that made him look so ? No, no, there was that weary expression about the mouth—it was only half-closed, and a hair from his brown beard had stolen across the upper lip—if I might only kiss it away ! A mad longing seized me to throw myself on his breast, to kiss him as much as I liked—oh, what joy, what bliss it would have been to die of his kisses ! And then I was shocked at myself and despised myself

for having no more pride than to love him still, to love him so, in spite of his treachery to me !

Sometimes I thought again of seeking death—oh, how gladly would I have died ! It was the simplest solution of the problem—nay, the only one. But his words still sounded in my ears : “ I have no desire to give occasion for scandal to the world.”

No, not an evident suicide, not only on account of the world, but for his sake. I would not poison his whole life ; he should only grieve for me a short time that a young life was sacrificed, and it should make him more serious, should cure him of his levity. It must seem to happen quite by chance—a fall out of the carriage—oh, no, no ! To lie mutilated before him—to live, perhaps, only to suffer—no, not that ! For I am a coward, I am afraid of pain.

And the water—ah, that was so cold ! Besides, that couldn't happen naturally. In summer it might be easier—a row on the Tiber, or on the sea—I could lean over too far. But he would hold me fast, he would save me, he would not let me drown !

Oh, I was ashamed to confess it to myself, but I had no talent for the *rôle* of heroine !

Dresden—Munich—Bologna—Rome—the places changed, but to me they were alike. What difference did it make to me whether I looked down on the Elbe from the Hotel Bellevue in Dresden, or looked out on the wet sidewalks of the Maximilian-

strasse from the "Four Seasons" in Munich, or on the Piazza di Spagna from the balcony of my room in the Albergo di Europa in Rome? The change of place had no effect on my trouble—that remained unchanged.





CHAPTER XXIII.

CHRISTMAS—and Christmas in Rome! Never in my life, not even in my happy childhood, had I looked forward with such pleasure to this festival as I had done before my marriage. With what secrecy I had painted the dressing-case for him, chosen a suitable decoration for every single object in it, and had placed the whole, well packed, in the bottom of my trunk, of which I always kept the key, so he should not come upon it by chance. And then, I had thought, we would celebrate the day quite alone together, and I would have a little tree—if it were only a pine-tree—and hang it full of all manner of trifles, accompanied by gay verses—I already knew a number—and now? How I dreaded that evening! Cool politeness would not be sufficient then—that was a time when the heart alone held sway, and if that failed or dared not speak, then gifts and Christmas-trees were a hollow farce, which only insulted both giver and receiver.

It was a great relief to me, therefore, when Feodor proposed to me to attend the Christmas celebration of the German Artists' Society, where they were to

have a Christmas-tree according to home custom. Ah, yes, to be in the midst of a throng ! That was the only way in which we could flee from ourselves. Any society was better than our own. On Christmas Eve we would go to the Sistine Chapel, and on Christmas Day to the Artists' Club—in this way we should manage to get through that painful time.

But Feodor, like myself, had prepared a surprise, and he did not withhold it. When we got home from the Sistine Chapel our salon was a blaze of light, and Wassili received me with a suppressed smile on his dark, bearded face. The good, faithful fellow ! He thought we were happy, and we both regarded him as our public and were careful not to do anything to disturb his illusion.

Feodor himself was more cheerful than I had seen him for a long time. He sprang up the stairs, two steps at a time, as he used to do, and received me, as I followed more slowly, at the open door.

How beautiful it was ! In the centre of the great room, just beneath the seven-branched chandelier which poured down its dazzling light full upon it, stood, surrounded by tall plants, a marble statue—the “Dying Gladiator.” I remembered having mentioned before him my admiration of this magnificent work, when we were looking over my Roman photographs ; he had noted this, and had had this excellent copy made.

Was this mere politeness ? Could a man do this who had married his wife not for love, but on account of a bet ?

I was so touched that I could not say a word. And then the statue itself—this image of death which speaks to us from every muscle ! 'The wild, Gallic barbarian, in all his rude strength—dying ! I looked across at Feodor—was there not a certain resemblance to him in this athletic figure, in the manner in which the abundant hair fell, like a mane, over the forehead ? And how moved he was himself, how searchingly his eyes rested, not on the statue, but on me !

With moistened eyes, I gave him my hand in token of my gratitude.

He held it fast, and, in spite of my faint resistance, drew me to him.

"Ella—it is Christmas Eve. I am not much of a Bible reader, but I always thought the 'peace on earth' very beautiful. Shall there not be peace between us ?"

How sweet the words sounded as they fell from his lips so close to my ear ! The angels' voices could not have given a sweeter tone to that "peace on earth !" But peace between us, with the dark shadow that separated us ! Oh, if he would only have acknowledged it, perhaps it would have been possible to forgive him ; but no, he thought his secret

safe and would not betray himself, and I—I could not explain. I tried to free myself from him, but he held my hand tight, and repeated, still more urgently: “Ella, shall there not be peace between us?”

“I—I will go and get your present now,” I stammered, hurrying away.

I had not intended to give it to him, for it was really a love-gift, into which I had wrought all the sweet memories of our engagement-time: but I could not help it now.

With trembling hands I got the dressing-case out of the trunk. On the cover was his name, surmounted by his coat of arms; in the arabesques at the corners were the heads of our two favorite horses and his greyhounds.

But the box was too heavy for me. I called my little *cameriera* Filippa, a nice young girl, whom I had engaged for my personal attendant. I was glad I did not have to go back alone. But Feodor's manner was changed. The happy smile had disappeared. Nor did it return as he took my offered gift; he scarcely glanced at it, apparently not noticing the care which had been bestowed upon the details.

The waiter interrupted this painful interview with the announcement that supper was ready in the adjoining dining-room. It was quite late. I forced myself to eat a little to keep him company, and it

seemed to me as if he were doing the same thing. Very soon I withdrew, remarking that I was tired.

It was no mere excuse. I was tired to death, but I could not sleep. I lay awake hour after hour, as I had already done for many nights before, and thought and wondered how it was possible that any man could put on such loving tones and glances if they did not come from the heart. How was it possible he could peril the happiness of his life for the sake of a bet? The "Ave Maria" had sounded from the neighboring church of Trinità de' Monti before sleep closed my weary eyes. .

Only to be in the midst of a throng, to plunge into a whirl of amusements and society engagements—anything rather than be alone with *him*!

On Christmas Day we had gone the usual round, had witnessed the display of the manger in Santa Maria Maggiore, had heard the wonderful children's sermon in Ara Cœli, had dined with Ackermann, the artist who had copied the "Dying Gladiator" for Feodor, and then spent the evening at the German Artists' Club.

It was a charming, a merry evening. The great room in the Palazzo Poli was very tastefully decorated, as was to be expected from such an artistic circle. A green, fragrant forest received us, garlands of creepers twining from tree to tree, and everywhere from out the thick green rose bright flower-calyxes,

from which, instead of the stamens, came brilliant gas-jets. Among these moved a throng of people in the most varied costumes, representing different nations, speaking various languages ; so there was a confusion of tongues like that at the tower of Babel.

"*Sia la benvenuta in Roma, signora !*" "*Ravi de vous voir ici !*" "Ah, I had no idea that you were here !" "*Fräulein Bella, ist's möglich ?*" Such were the words that greeted me, for during my former sojourn here I had moved continually in these circles, and I found here now numerous acquaintances.

The last greeting, in real Berlinesse, was addressed to me by a painter from that city, one of my teachers during my craze for art. I was glad to see him again, and we chatted, laughed, and danced together, and I was gayer than I had been for a long time ; since my wedding-day, in fact.

Feodor, too, seemed to share in the general merriment ; nevertheless, every time I looked at him I met his eyes fixed on me. We were both observing each other. When he inquired if I were not tired, I laughed at the idea, and begged that we might stay longer. We were among the last to leave.

Yes, it was a charming, a merry evening.

But I did not escape the reaction. It is true, by my bodily weariness I had purchased a few hours' sleep, but I woke with a headache and felt so ner-

vous that Wassili's gay whistle on the stairs—he had brought the inevitable Fatinitza march to Rome with him—drove me nearly frantic.

Of course, I put a constraint upon myself during breakfast, and assured Feodor that I had enjoyed the evening very much.

"Then we must go again some time," he remarked, leaning back in his chair. "It seems to be the only element in which you are at home."

It was the first harsh word I had ever heard from him. The tears, which were all ready to flow, came into my eyes, and I had a frightful struggle to keep them from falling. It was impossible for me to answer a single word. He looked at me, but the look was as hard as his words and tone had been, and, in spite of myself, the tears overflowed and fell slowly down my cheeks.

He flushed crimson. I could see it was not compassion for me, but anger, that awoke in him. He flung his cigar down with an impetuous gesture, and it happened to fall on my dress. I drew it away with an expression of disgust, and got up to leave the room.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered out—the *corpus delicti* flew into the fireplace—"but can you inform me why you are crying?"

I brushed the tears off my eye-lashes, and replied, with a suppressed sob, "I am not crying."

He laughed out scornfully. Oh, what a laugh—how it sounded in my ears! “No, you are not crying,” he cried, “not now! You will no doubt be laughing and jesting in a minute! It is really particularly unfortunate that I, who hate nothing in the world so much as caprice, should have the most capricious woman in the whole creation for my wife!”

This was the first violent scene in the drama we were playing. Would it lead to the solution of the problem?





CHAPTER XXIV.

SIGHT-SEEING—day after day, week after week. Oh, how much pleasure I had anticipated in visiting with him the places which I had formerly enjoyed so much—with him who had such fine taste in art and who understood everything so much better than I ! And now ? It is true, we stood together under the gloomy ruins of the Capitol, we wandered through the magnificent remains of the Colosseum, we went from monument to monument, from work of art to work of art—but instead of pleasure I experienced only torture. I took the greatest pains only to look at things with the outward eye, not to let any impression sink into my soul, for I knew that if I had really allowed myself to be carried away by admiration and enthusiasm, as in the old days, I should cry—and that I must not do.

How often, when we were wandering through the magnificent picture-galleries in the Palazzo Borghese, or were looking at the immortal forms in the Vatican, I have shut my eyes, hoping, with the closing of that

outer door, to shut out from my soul the power of these masterpieces. Sometimes I perceived how Feodor turned away from me with a disappointed look when I thus drew down my veil to cover up any rising emotion ; once he even muttered something about the confounded gauze which women would interpose between themselves and even the finest Raphael, but I could not do otherwise. I was *obliged* to keep to the surface of things. I dared not dive into the depths—for these depths were a sea of tears !

One day we were wandering through the endless halls of St. Peter's. It was toward evening The monster cathedral was empty, or seemed so ; deep shadows lurked under the mighty columns, only on the balustrade round the grave of St. Peter still burned the fifty-nine lamps, and the pillars of gilded bronze belonging to the tabernacle shone in their light.

I stood dreaming, a few steps from Feodor, who was talking to the *custode*, when suddenly from out a neighboring chapel sounded the pure, wailing tones of a Miserere by Palestrina sung by magnificent soprano voices.

Hitherto I had avoided hearing music as much as possible, and when it was not to be avoided I had been prepared for it and had braced myself against its influence. But now I was taken by surprise. I

was entirely off my guard, and I drew in the divine sounds in full measure.

But if beauty of form and color had easily drawn tears from my eyes, the power of music, which works upon the nerves like nothing else in the world, had far more effect upon me. The long-pent-up stream broke forth irresistibly; I felt that every struggle was in vain. I turned quickly aside a few steps into the dusky aisle, and soon found myself sheltered by the colossal statue of a pope who was stretching his hands out in blessing. I sank down at his feet and, leaning my head against the cold marble, I wept passionately and without restraint.

Oh, if I might only have wept so for hours—for days—at the feet of this strong figure, which did not ask me, even by a glance, why I was crying! Oh, what a comfort to throw off this burden of tears which weighed so heavily on my spirit! And then the sweet, heavenly tones, which sounded to me like angels' voices and robbed the scalding tears of their bitterness! I heard Feodor's voice calling me, but I did not reply—only a few minutes longer to weep like this, I thought, and then I could be calm again for a long time.

But he came nearer. Now he had discovered me, and stopped in astonishment. I got up from the cold floor and went toward him in silence. It

did not occur to me to hide my tear-stained face, for it would have been useless.

He stared at me for a moment and then he said, in a hard tone :

“ A scene here ? That, too ! ”

And he offered me his arm to lead me away.

“ You can cry again to-night,” I said to myself, as one comforts a little child whose plaything one has taken away.

But I did not cry that night—I meditated.

As I lay wide awake, with burning eyes, in the quiet of the night, only broken by the plashing of the Barcuccia, the beautiful fountain of the Tiber in the square below, it became clear to me that this state of things could not go on any longer. He who had once been so dear and good had grown hard and cold, and I could not die of my grief—oh, how gladly would I have died—but I was wearing myself out and making him unhappy. What was to be done ?

Oh, that Ranzoff—how cruelly he had revenged himself ! Revenge—for what ? Because I did not love him ? But that was not my fault. However—this dawned upon me gradually—I was not entirely free from blame. I had amused myself with him, laughed at him, treated him like an obedient slave who has no right to ask any return for his service except to be endured. I had trodden upon him

like a worm, and the worm had turned. And how he had stung me—a venomous, incurable sting! Was there no remedy?

Only one—to speak out, to break the silence he had imposed upon me. But my sense of honor forbade it. I should thus place myself on a level with him, the traitor. Could I not write to him and tell him that his letter had come too late to save me from these degrading bonds, that I demanded he should give me back my word, in order to break my chains?

I felt an indescribable reluctance to renewing any relations with this man, whom I hated as much as I despised him. Nevertheless, I might have made the attempt which had occurred to me if there had not been another obstacle in the way—I did not know his address. It was not given in his letter; my letter would have to pursue him all through America.

No; it would not do. There was nothing left for me but the *rôle* of a weak and passive woman—to wait.



CHAPTER XXV.

FEODOR probably observed my wan appearance the next morning, for when I sat opposite him at the breakfast-table he asked me how I did.

"So much sight-seeing and going about seems to tire you," he said. He did not look at me as he spoke, but was looking carefully in the silver sugar-bowl for a suitable lump for his black coffee. "Of course, I do not wish to drag you about to all the churches and museums against your will. If you prefer to go home—to Berlin," he said, correcting himself, "you have only to say so."

Home! He was right to take back that word. Had we any "home"? Would any place ever be home-like to us? No, we were condemned to remain strangers to each other, and we should feel like strangers everywhere, wherever we went.

Home! Here, breakfast-time was the only time when we were regularly alone together, and I never, never took my seat opposite him without a violent beating of the heart, from fear of what he might say to me. But at home, to be thrown together

entirely, always dreading what he might say or how he might look—that I could not endure ! And then, the people ! Here, in their indifference, they were my salvation ; there they would be observers, would be our judges. I already seemed to feel their searching glances directed toward us, and to hear the spiteful remarks ; saw myself sitting opposite my aunt with her piercing black eyes, her indiscreet questions to which I could make no answer—oh, no, no, only not to go home. The explanation, the end must come here, and then I would never, never go back home again. I would rather bury myself in a convent, since I could not die—somewhere up there with the *Dames du Sacré Cœur*, who sang so beautifully in the night——

“I asked you if you wished to return to Berlin—I must request you to answer me.”

His voice sounded hard again, but it was true I had kept him waiting too long.

I replied that I would rather stay here, if he did not object.

“Very well. But you must not go about so much, We have time enough. I have an appointment to-day with my friend Batutcheff——”

“Ah, the gentleman whose card we found the other day ?”

“Yes ; I introduced him to you at the artists' ball. But you don't remember—you were so taken up

with that little painter, Professor What's-his-name, at the time, that you had no eyes for any one else. Batutcheff is not a painter, it is true, but he has been a good friend of mine for a long time, and if he comes here I must ask you to treat him accordingly."

I looked at Feodor in amazement. Did I not treat all his acquaintances with the attention they had a right to expect, as such? Much more civilly, in fact, than he treated mine! It occurred to me now that when I had asked him to visit Bardo's—the professor's—studio, he had declined and had prevented me from going there also. Evidently he did not like the painter—why? If he accused me of caprice, I could return the compliment in this case.

But, now I thought of it, I remembered that I had promised Bardo to come and see him. He had been to the hotel, but we were out; it was a simple act of courtesy to return the visit. His pictures would interest me, too, and then—yes, capital idea—I could try to paint again a little myself! As at that time when I received that abominable—and, alas! only too true—copy of verses, my art seemed to me the best means of escaping the torture of my own thoughts, so now I would take refuge with it again. Hitherto, when I was alone—and I was often alone in the evenings—I had occupied myself with my "Blue-Book," I had confided my sorrows to this trusty

friend—with a feeling that the writing of them might give me relief. But this occupation continually took me back to what I would so gladly forget—while my painting would divert my thoughts.

And I need not be embarrassed for want of a subject here—the copy of some masterpiece, or, perhaps, an original picture—the Spanish steps with their collection of models were so near! There was the pretty little brown boy who was always offering me his Roman views—he would make a pretty picture.

I carried out my intention. While Feodor was keeping his appointment with his Russian friend, I went to Professor Bardo. He seemed glad to see me, showed me his works, and we talked of art and artists—I fell at once into the old, careless tone. He put his studio at my disposal, in case I remained long in Rome and had a desire to resume my painting, and with the eagerness of former times, when I never allowed much time to elapse between making a plan and carrying it out, I promised to come again the very next day, with my model, the brown boy of the Spanish stairs.

My cheerful mood must have betrayed itself at dinner, where I met Feodor, for he remarked upon it and asked if I were inclined to go with him to the theatre, where “*Tannhäuser*” was to be given.

“*Tannhäuser*!” Wagner in Rome! At any other

time I should have been charmed with the idea. But now? I do not know any music that affects the nerves so powerfully as Wagner's—and "*Tannhäuser*," above all. The magnificent singer who wanders away to the Venusberg, and loses the love of the noble *Elizabeth*—oh, I did not compare myself with that poetic figure but Feodor—was not the resemblance to *Tannhäuser* a close one? So much that was good and noble—and, with it all, the *one* stain that dimmed all his glory! And in one particular I could compare myself, also, with the noble *Elizabeth*; she, too, loved her hero in spite of his unworthiness; she clung to him, she protected him, prayed for him, and, when he was lost to her, she died for him. Oh, *Elizabeth*, how well I could understand you!

But to witness this representation, to listen to those heart-breaking words and tones—that I could not do! I tried to think of an excuse, but, unaccustomed as I was to speaking anything but the truth, I was very clumsy.

"Why don't you say straight out you will not?" cried Feodor, impetuously, and the silver knife he held in his hand fell with such force on the edge of the glass plate that the latter broke.

As usual, when he had given way to anger, he reddened and his wrath gave place to mortification, but we did not speak and separated coldly.

That night I listened long for the sound of the elastic step, which I always knew when it came up the stair, paused a moment at my door, and then entered the adjoining room. Twelve o'clock struck—one—and still he did not come.

"If anything should happen to him," I thought, as I sat up in bed, listening anxiously, "it would be my fault, and it is my fault if he seeks pleasures that he could not share with me, if he gambles or——"

I dared not carry out my thought. I hid my burning face in the pillow and prayed: "O my God, deliver him from evil!" But I had no faith that my prayer would be heard.

How pale, how worn he looked the next morning! How the tired lines about his mouth had deepened! Oh, and I could do nothing to help him! But I would not leave him to-day. Where he went I would go too, would try to cheer him up, to divert his thoughts——

"I have made an appointment with Batutcheff and some others to go shooting to-morrow," he said, interrupting my thoughts; "I must make some arrangements for it to-day, but if you need me—I mean, if you wish for my company——"

I listened to his voice; it did not sound hard, but weary, indifferent. He did not finish his sentence, but looked at me inquiringly, and, fearing he might be offended again at my hesitation, I declared,

quickly, that I was glad to have him amuse himself, that I did not need his escort.

"I corrected myself," he interposed, sharply, "I know very well that you do not need my company."

So it had already come to that—he was weighing my words! The tears came to my eyes—but that would only occasion another "scene;" no, I must not let him see them. So I choked them back, the bitter drops, and gazed steadily at the English newspaper Mrs. Tremlett had sent me, while he read his letters; but it was a matter of perfect indifference to me whether Lord Beaconsfield triumphed or sent in his resignation—everything was indifferent to me.

How long would this life continue? How long could I bear it? How long would his patience hold out?

"I am not patient by nature," he had said, that time. No, truly, it was not natural to him; then why did he do violence to his natural disposition, instead of breaking the cruel chain?





CHAPTER XXVI.

I PASSED the two following mornings in the studio of the professor.

Little Cecchino—a slim little fellow of eleven or twelve years—gladly went with me to be painted, and amused me by the eagerness with which he threw his delicate, supple limbs into every possible position. In the mean time he related, with great self-consciousness, how often he had been painted—once as a choir-boy in a procession, once as a shepherd-boy with his goat-skin and his *zampogna*, and once when he was younger—and here his great, black eyes sparkled with pride—as San Giovanni, the infant St. John, with the holy Christ-child and the blessed mother of God.

He was curious to know in what character I was going to paint him—but I intended only to make a study of a head at first ; afterward I would see in what way I could make use of him.

At dinner, which we had ordered at four, I met Feodor again. He brought back some wild ducks by way of game, and, as I perceived with genuine

pleasure, a good appetite and a cheerful mood. I interested myself in his report of his day and encouraged him to talk of the wonderful Campagna, which possessed such a charm for me—with its magnificent plains and its gloomy silence, only interrupted now and then by the panting, hissing engine, the wild huntsman of the nineteenth century, or, as Feodor playfully added, “by the tame hunt of ducks and hens with which the degenerate scions of the nineteenth century amuse themselves.”

“Hen and duck shooting in the Campagna! But that is absolute sacrilege,” I cried, laughing. “In such magnificent surroundings only great deeds should be carried out—such as a secret murder——”

“That, no doubt, happens oftener than one thinks,” said Feodor. “Just try this *beccaccia*; it is very delicate, and probably comes from the Campagna. For the rest, the shooting there is not confined to hens and ducks—there are also wild boars there; they suit the magnificent landscape better, don’t they?”

“But you are not going to hunt them? I should die of anxiety!” escaped my lips. But the next moment I regretted my thoughtlessness, for Feodor’s eyes rested on my face—which first turned pale and then flushed deeply—and there came into them that soft, appealing expression which always

seemed to me like the dawning of love. My own sank before them.

Strange! Husband and wife, married for weeks, and yet uncertain in word and look as in the first hesitating essays of awakening affection!

"That terrifies you? Then you fear danger for me?" he said, gently, and I felt my heart beat as at the first words of a lover.

The entrance of the waiter with the dessert fortunately relieved me of the necessity of replying, and, although we then were left alone, the conversation did not return to that subject. We talked about indifferent matters, but in the course of conversation I asked him if he would be at home this evening.

"If you wish it, certainly." Again that soft voice, that appealing look—no, no longer appealing—an ardent, fiery look which I could not bear. I plucked mechanically at the beautiful muscadel grapes on my plate, and said, as calmly as possible:

"Do not stay at home on my account."

This answer brought the flush of anger to his cheek instantly, and he cried, impetuously: "I certainly should not stay for my own pleasure. I see that you prefer your own society to mine; I will not force myself upon you!"

Another lonely evening, another sleepless night, another long watch from hour to hour for his step, which did not come till late, and then seemed to me

heavy and slow ! In his room, close by, a clinking as of loose coin on the table and hasty movements—several impatient exclamations ; then all was still, except for the monotonous plashing of the water in the fountain in the square below, and my sighs and tears, which I stifled in my pillows.

Pale and silent, we sat opposite each other the next morning at breakfast. Feodor had excused himself for coming in a few minutes after me—oh, he neglected no duty of politeness ! Then he turned to his letters.

Uppermost on the silver salver which held the letters—it was always placed at Feodor's plate, and I found it very disagreeable to receive all my letters from him—lay a great envelope with an official seal. It had caught my eye as soon as I entered the room, and Feodor, too, took it up with evident interest. What could it contain ?

"We will not have any secrets from each other," we had promised mutually on the eve of our marriage. And now he read the large and probably important letter through, and then read the others, without saying a word to me, and I—I had not the courage to ask a single question.

Then he rapidly ate his breakfast—mine was only a form, as usual—and left the room.

What should I do—wait till he condescended to give me some information ? No, indeed, I would

not. Cecchino was waiting for me ; the best thing I could do would be to go to the studio. I sent the porter for a fiacre, and drove to Professor Bardo's.

Cecchino sprang to meet me with a beaming face. His black, curly head shone with the oil he had poured over it. He was delighted to earn five francs a day, and a dinner in the neighboring *trattoria*. He vowed and declared that I was the noblest and most beautiful madonna in all Christendom, and admired every stroke I put to his picture.

But my professor was not so easily pleased. He drew his hand several times through his tawny mane, and said: "It is a very fine head, very boldly sketched, but it isn't the boy. Just look, yourself—the nose is too large, the mouth too grave, and then the hair—you have let a lock fall over the forehead, that changes the expression."

"But it was so yesterday," I insisted. "To-day the vain little fellow has oiled himself up so that the hair and the whole form of the head are changed."

"It may be so; but still, that is not a child's face. It looks much too old. This grave mouth, and the expression of the eyes—wait a minute, let me think whom it looks like—I have seen a face like it—ah, I have it—true—the head resembles your husband, Frau von Amstetten!"

I blushed up to the roots of my hair. He was right. Now, as I looked at the picture, I could not

understand why I had not perceived it myself. Yes, these were his eyes, it was his mouth, and his own peculiar lock of hair. There stood my model before me, but instead of sketching his features I had drawn those which were before my eyes day and night.

I could find nothing to say, and in my embarrassment I repeated his last words. "Frau von Amstetten—how quickly you have got accustomed to it, professor! I should have thought 'Fräulein Bella' would have come more natural to you."

"Why, do you think your marriage made so little impression upon me?" He tried to assume a pathetic tone, which, in this little, eager man with the yellow mane, was utterly absurd. I laughed aloud.

"And besides," he continued, brought back to his natural tone by my laughter, "it is not at all easy to confuse Frau von Amstetten with the Fräulein Sarneck whom I parted with two years ago. Don't you know that you are very much changed?"

"Really! In what respect?"

"Well, you have grown much handsomer," he replied, planting himself before me, with his arms crossed, as if I were a portrait that he had been asked to criticise. And in the same calm, abstract fashion, as if it were question of a picture alone, with the freedom peculiar to the artist in judging a

figure from an æsthetic stand-point, he explained to me what advantageous changes the last two years had wrought in me. One could no more be angry with him when he spoke of the rounding of the figure, the clearing of the complexion, and so on, than one would be with a doctor who tells us that our too luxuriant hair is the cause of our headaches.

"More particularly, however," he continued, "is it the expression of your face which has changed. The former piquant, mocking expression about the mouth has given way to a softer, more dreamy one—the awakened soul of the woman speaks through it. And then your eyes! They were always the most beautiful feature of your face. I remember a friend of mine once compared them to those of the Sistine Madonna—but now they have softened and deepened, there is a mysterious depth in their velvet irids—every time you raise your lids one hopes to find the solution of the mystery, and every time one is disappointed. In this there lies a peculiar charm. Really, Madonna, I should like to try my skill at catching that charm. A good mixture of asphalt and ultramarine——"

He stood before me as if I were a model whom he was studying in order to get the necessary colors. I looked at him, half-vexed, half-amused at his easy manner; but, in spite of abstractness, both on his part and my own, I could not help blushing.

In order to restore my self-possession, I grasped my charcoal and proceeded to complete my sketch—now, however, with intention, not the head of the child who was crouching on the ground before me, eating figs out of his pocket, but the head which at this moment—as always—was floating before my eyes. The brow a little broader, the mouth, ah! that beautiful, expressive mouth I should never succeed in catching. And yet—a few strokes in the corners of the mouth and then the beard—really, the likeness was striking! Oh, I would paint the picture, it should be my comfort, my bitter happiness, my sweet sorrow in the time when—when——

“And it is precisely in this costume that I should like to paint you, too,” continued the professor, calmly. “That brown-green velvet suits you admirably; it is exactly the color that Rembrandt loved. Dull olive—it harmonizes perfectly with your coloring; that is no compliment. Well, I shouldn’t exactly call your complexion one of lilies and roses, but you have a style of your own—I am already looking forward to the picture with pleasure——”

At this moment the professor’s servant opened the door of the studio, but, before he could get out more than “Un signore,” the person so announced came in. It was Feodor.

If the statue in “Don Giovanni” had come to visit us, I could not have been more startled than at my

husband's appearance. Every vestige of color left my face, and my heart began to beat violently. I was obliged to support myself against the arm of my chair in order not to fall.

Feodor stood—really like the marble statue—for one moment motionless in the door-way ; then he took his broad hat off with a deliberation that had something insulting in it, and said, without noticing Bardo's outstretched hand : “ I beg your pardon, if I am disturbing you ; but I learned that my wife was here, and I came to take her home.”

He had *learned* that his wife was here—abominable ! As if I had made a secret of it, or, rather, as if he had ever asked me what I was doing while he was occupied with his own pleasures !

“ I am ready,” I said, shortly, and went to get my cloak, which the professor, *faute de mieux*, had hung over the lay figure. He was about to take it down, but Feodor forestalled him and helped me to put on my things with a haste which surprised as much as it offended me.

Cecchino had watched these proceedings in silence with shrewd eyes. At length he came up to me and asked, in a humble tone, but with an appealing look which was not to be misunderstood, “ Shall I come again to-morrow, Illustrissima ? ”

“ No, my boy, the lady will not need you any more,” replied Feodor, before I could answer, and

threw a gold piece to the boy, who caught it skillfully in his mouth, and showed it to me, with a grin, between his teeth.

I was furious! Should I suffer myself to be carried off like a child who had been naughty? I declined Feodor's offered arm, and went up to Professor Bardo, who, in great embarrassment and uncertainty as to what he should say or do, was pulling at his yellow beard.

"As soon as I feel like painting again I will come back," I said, giving him my hand. Then I went quickly up to my easel, and, with a rapid movement loosening the drawing from the board, I crushed it up in my hand and put it in my pocket.

Feodor looked on in silence. Then he bowed coldly to poor Bardo, who, in his embarrassment, presented a sorry picture.

"I thank you, Herr Professor, for permitting my wife to work in your studio," he said, somewhat in the tone with which the Spanish king thanked his unlucky subject who had saved the queen's life and now must die because he had held her in his arms.

Before the door stood a fiacre. Feodor opened the carriage-door, but I was so outraged at his tyranny that I turned away and walked a step or two toward the street, although I was well aware that at this moment all opposition was useless. But—absolutely as if I had been a naughty child—he

took me lightly round the waist (with such a light and yet such a firm grasp!) and put me into the carriage. I could have shrieked with rage, but my very anger dried up my tears and choked my voice. I sank back on the cushions of the carriage without a word.

I had pulled down my veil and shut my eyes, but, notwithstanding this, it seemed to me that I could feel Feodor's eyes resting upon me. The noises in the street sounded dully in my ear—the cries of the street-sellers who were praising their wares, the wailing “*Per carità*” of the beggars, the rattling of the carriages on the rough pavement. What had I to do with all this? The outer world was indifferent to me. I was only conscious of the storm raging within, and, with a sort of wild satisfaction, I felt that I was beginning to hate *him*! Yes, at this moment I really hated him. Oh, now the struggle that was wearing me out would come to an end, now it would be easy for me to break these degrading chains.

Suddenly I perceived Feodor standing up in the carriage. Without moving, myself, my eyes followed him. He took off his coat. How strange! The day was sunny, but cold. He would get cold, get ill! Now he rolled it up tightly and—put it under my feet!

Ah, he had observed that the seat was so broad

that my feet did not quite touch the bottom of the carriage. Was he trying to atone for his tyranny by this attention? Oh, he must indeed think me a child, to whom one gives a sugar-plum when one has punished it unjustly. But I was not a child—he should soon learn that! I had the greatest desire to thrust away the improvised footstool, but I did not do it, I only remained passive.

And yet—and yet—this insignificant action had sufficed to crush out the hatred which I had greeted so joyfully. Oh, God, what must he do then, how must he ill-treat me to enable me to tear this obstinate fatal love from my heart? Was it not disgraceful thus to be the sport of his whims? No, I would not forgive him; I would not crush out my hatred.

Now we were driving down the long Via Condotta to the Piazza di Spagna. "Albergo di Europa," announced the coachman, as he stopped before our hotel.

I would have declined his assistance in descending, but I could not. It is abominable to be so small that one always requires assistance. And how ceremoniously he offered me his arm to take me in, so that all the by-standers—the curled waiter, with his fox-eyes, at their head—must have thought us the tenderest couple in the world. Oh, what a degrading farce! But I knew that he was a good actor—

for a while longer I, too, must play the part forced upon me, but soon—soon——

“Are you tired? Shall I take you to your room? If not, I wish to speak to you.”

“I am not tired; I am ready to listen to you.”

Oh, I must not let this moment pass! The bitterness was still there; I had still a remnant of hatred left to encounter him with.

Feodor took me into the salon, to the little sofa by the window. On the mosaic table, near by, stood a splendid camellia in full bloom. Was it he who always took care to have fresh flowers in this favorite place of mine? The yellow winter sun shone full into the window; he let the curtains down to shut it out. Then he seated himself in a chair, opposite me.

What did he want? To read me a lecture, or to put me on my trial? I was determined not to submit to either. Besides, was it for him to talk to me, or for me to talk to him? The cause for offence was certainly on my side. So I anticipated him with the remark that, however he might choose to treat *me*, I must beg him to show to my friends that civility which was customary in polite society.

“To treat you?” he repeated, as if he had not heard anything else. “Have I treated you ill?”

The tone in which he uttered these words was so sad, so low, so almost humble, that I felt the anger

that had risen within me die away. But I would not be weak, I would not be subjected to his whims !

I told him that he had treated me like a child, like a weak, foolish child that in its want of sense and reason had been guilty of some fault. "But the poor professor," I concluded, impetuously ; "you treated him like a servant, like one of your Russian slaves ! You have shown anything but good breeding in behaving like that to a man of honor, a clever artist, and my friend."

"He has certainly a great many titles to respect. I am sorry to have failed in honoring them."

There was something so scornful in his tone, in the expression about his mouth, that my anger rose again.

"What have you to say against him ?" I inquired, coldly.

"What have I to say against this excellent man of honor, artist, etc.?" He laughed disdainfully. "Oh, nothing—nothing at all ! On the contrary, I admire his versatility ; for, besides the art of painting, he evidently also possesses that of entertaining and charming young women, and of— How animated you looked as he stood before you talking ; it is long since I have seen such a color in your cheeks ! It was very awkward of me, very indiscreet, to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*. I am sure I beg your pardon."

Strange ! Did not this sound like jealousy ? But that could not be ! " Jealousy belongs to love as shadow to light," he had said to me once. But where the light fails no shadow can exist. Can a man love a woman whom he has made the subject of a wager ?

Happily, I had again wrought myself up to anger, and I had a scornful reply on my lips when Feodor took the big letter of this morning from his pocket, and said, in a different tone : " Let us drop this subject. I wished to speak with you about this letter."

" Ah, the letter you received this morning ? "

" Yes. I did not wish to speak to you about it till I was clear in my own mind as to my wishes with regard to the contents. Of course, however, I will try to make these agree with yours, for it is a question of our future——"

Our future ! as if that could be in common ! If he thought I was willing to go on living like this——

" The letter is from the Cabinet at Berlin," he continued, as I remained silent. " You remember, perhaps, that after our engagement I took steps to obtain an appointment to the diplomatic corps. It was your wish at that time. It is true, I cannot venture to conclude that that is still the case, for I have discovered that a bride and a wife are two very different beings. But the fact is, that my request

has been granted. This letter brings me my appointment as Secretary of Legation to the Prussian Embassy at St. Petersburg."

Secretary of Legation at St. Petersburg! No longer idle, no longer the rich nobleman, who had nothing to do but to amuse himself! An appointment, a position suited to his capacity! It had been my most ardent desire; joy brought a flush of color to my cheeks. But, ah! what part had I in it now? Could I, ought I, to share his future? Never!

I stood up. "You must first accept my congratulations," I said, coldly. "You will allow me to think of what you have said, and to give you my answer later."

He bowed, and followed me to the door to open it for me. But I could see the bitter expression about his firmly closed lips, and, as the door closed behind me, I thought I could hear a slight groan.

Oh, my God, why might I not speak?





CHAPTER XXVII.

AGAIN followed torturing hours of thought and uncertainty. Could I not bring him, then, to acknowledge his fault himself? If he were repentant he might, perhaps, hope for pardon; but in his careless levity he evidently laid no great stress upon his action, otherwise he must have guessed, long ago, that this, and *only* this, could have made such a change in me. But, probably—so I always defended him in my own mind—his lips were closed like mine, and, whatever his faults might be, he could not break his word, even when that word had been passed to a scoundrel. No, there was no way out of it for me, nothing but—separation.

Separation—separation from him! Oh, the remedy was worse than the disease!

But if it did not take place now, it never would. If I accompanied him to St. Petersburg I should have yielded, submitted to my degraded position. That must not be. And this change would make our separation easier. He could go there alone—to get things in readiness, we would say; then I

would go to England to my faithful Tremlett—never to return either to him or to Berlin. For, before my absence could excite any remark, he would receive one day from Mrs. Tremlett the news that I had been drowned while out rowing, or that I had died suddenly of heart disease—that is what doctors generally say when they do not know the cause of death, and there are poisons that do not betray themselves. Then people would condole with him—he would put on mourning—everything would be very *comme il faut*, no breath of scandal—he ought to be satisfied with me. Calm, self-controlled, but cold and unmoved as a stone, I sat before my writing-desk and put down on paper the decision I had come to.

“I am glad that you are going to enter upon active life once more, and I wish you all happiness for the future. But I cannot share this future with you. What I said to you on the day after our marriage I must now repeat—we must separate. Why? If you have a conscience, you cannot ask. But whether you guess it or not, my decision is irrevocable.

“ARABELLA.”

Slowly I folded the sheet, put it in an envelope, which I carefully sealed, and wrote his name upon it.

When did I write to him last? Ah, while we were engaged—one of those little notes on cream-tinted paper in which, like an insignificant gift among a mass of flowers, there lay some question, or some proposition hidden away among numberless

words of love. Here there was no mass of flowers, and the letter that I was sending him contained the proposition—lasting separation!

I would put the letter in his room—here, close by my own. I had never entered it before—the door which connected the rooms had been kept shut. With tottering steps I approached it now, and laid my hand on the knob.

How I trembled! As if I were about to commit a crime! Holding my breath, I listened to hear if there were any noise within. No, all was still—I pushed open the door.

His room—I entered it for the first and last time. I looked round to find a place where I could put the letter. There—on the toilet-table. What confusion reigned here—how disorderly it all looked! A bachelor's room, in which no woman's hand was visible. There, on the floor, was something shining—a gold piece! Probably a piece of the money he had brought home yesterday—gambling gains! I laid it on the table, the letter beside it—then I crept slowly out of the room as silently as I had come, and bolted the door again.

I also bolted the one opposite, which led into the dining-room, and from there into the salon. So now I was alone, now no one could—ah, I had forgotten the door into the hall. I was hastening to fasten that also, when some one knocked.

It was Filippa, my little *cameriera*, who came to call me to dinner. Without opening the door, I told her to excuse me to her master as I was not well.

It was no vain pretext. My head burned like fire, my temples throbbed as if they would burst, and each breath was a pain.

I threw myself on my bed and pressed my burning brow into the cool pillows, but the coolness did not diminish the fever. A comforting thought came to me—what if I were to be ill of typhus fever, and should die of it! And I should be sure to die, my old doctor had told me so once—I have a constitution that would be sure to succumb to an illness of that sort. To die—not to feel any more, not to suffer any more—it would be a blessing for me and for him! But, first, I would give him the fatal letter—on one's death-bed all secrets are disclosed—I would tell him how I loved him and that—that I pardoned him——

I do not know whether it was a swoon or a merciful sleep which made me forget my torture for a few hours. At all events, I lost consciousness. When I awoke it was quite dark. The pain in my head was gone, it only felt dull and heavy. For a long time I lay in this half-conscious condition, which is always a blessing when full consciousness only brings pain. But I could not remain very long in this

mental twilight ; the cruel light of reality soon flooded my soul, bringing into full prominence the horrors of the last few hours. Now this outward quiet and darkness were torture to me. I rose with difficulty, opened the door, and called Filippa.

She lighted the lamp and looked at me with a shake of her head.

"Illustrissima is ill," she said, sympathetically, while she helped to undress me.

"Ah, *il bel vestito*—what a pity ! " And she pityingly smoothed out the folds of the velvet dress, which I had crushed by lying upon it.

"What time is it ?"

"It is late, Illustrissima—the clock on the Santa Trinità has struck eight. Will not Illustrissima have something to eat ?"

"No, thanks. Is not your master at home ?"

I had listened in vain for any sound from his room. Had he come into it and found the letter ? Perhaps, while I was unconscious——

"The *padrone* has gone out," she replied, in her soft Roman speech. "I heard the porter ask the *padrone* if he should get him a fiacre, but he refused. He came to the door here twice, but he did not come in because, I suppose, he did not wish to disturb Illustrissima. And what shall I say to the *padrone* when he asks for you ? A little better ? That is good. By to-morrow I hope Illustrissima will be quite well

again—I will pray to the holy Madonna for her. But it is cool here—I will put some coal on the fire, and if *Illustrissima* should need anything, I shall be close by.”

I dismissed the friendly little maid, and locked the door.

So he had been here twice ! Then he must have been in his own room. He had found the letter, and wanted to speak to me—and now he had gone away. Everything was settled—it was all over ! I put out the light, which hurt my burning eyes, and sank heavily, like a lifeless body, on my bed.

Again the soft splash of the *Barcaccia*, outside on the piazza, again the monotonous striking of the clock on the *Trinità de' Monti*. From one quarter to another seemed to me an eternity. And every pulse and fibre of my frame kept time with the strokes outside, and filled the pauses with their torturing throbbing and beating. I felt this throbbing in my head, it sounded deafeningly in my ears, it grew to a loud, hammering sound which, beaten regularly, incessantly, by an unseen hand, fell heavily and painfully on my heart. At every stroke I groaned aloud, and every stroke seemed to whisper in his own voice, dully but audibly : “Over, all over ! All over !”

Then it seemed as if a ray of light streamed into the night of my misery. As I turned my head

(what an effort it cost me to lift my head ! but I had to loosen my hair, it oppressed me so) I saw a bright streak of light on the white curtain—a faint, trembling flicker playing on the ceiling. I knew very well it was the reflection of the lantern which burned in front of the house ; but the ray of light, in the midst of the darkness about me, had something comforting in it for me—it seemed to me like a glimmer of hope in the night of my despair. From time to time I looked at the light, and said to myself that, so long as it burned, all was not over.

Foolish, childish superstition of a despairing heart ! But unhappiness makes one foolish and childish and superstitious.

And then—there was another support in my helplessness—his step ! Dull and heavy it sounded on the steps, quite different from its former elasticity ; but I recognized it, nevertheless. Now it approached my door—it stopped before it—oh, could he not hear how frightfully my heart beat ? Then he turned away and entered his own room.

Then there was a movement in the room, a pulling about of furniture, a conversation with Wassili, who had, no doubt, been waiting for him there—but it was all done as low and softly as possible.

Then Wassili left the room. Now he would go to bed, and the movement which it did me so much good to hear would cease. But no ! He was still wander-



MY DREAM CAME BACK TO ME AGAIN.

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ing about, with restless steps, over the carpet ; several times he approached the door which opened into my room, it even seemed as if he were standing still there and listening (thank God ! I had locked it) ; then, again, the monotonous sound of steps on the carpet.

At length it ceased. There was an opening and shutting of drawers, a rustling of paper, then the light scratching of a pen. What could he be writing about at this late hour ? Ah, was he answering my letter ? As he could not speak to me, he was obliged to write—that was very natural. But that would soon be over, and he was writing so long—for hours, it seemed to me.

Now he pushed back his chair—then there was another slight movement—then all was still—the stillness of death ! And, as if everything should unite to torture me, at this moment the ray of light on the curtain suddenly vanished. It was night—gloomy night. “All is over ! All is over !”—all the spirits of darkness seemed to shriek over and over again in my ear.

My position grew more intolerable every minute. At length I roused myself and poured out a narcotic which I had had by my bed ever since I had suffered from sleeplessness. But it was long before my excited nerves would yield to the opiate. I wrestled with it, I groaned, I called up all my

strength to master it ; but at length it got the better of me, I fell, I sank down deeper and deeper in an endless, bottomless abyss, down to the very bottom of the sea—and, moaning dully, the waves closed over me.

And there—there I had a wonderful vision. The water was suddenly clear, transparent. A face appeared on its surface above me—a face, ah ! so dear to me ! It bent over me. I thought I felt its breath. A soft lock of hair brushed my forehead. Then my hair, which spread out like a dark stream, rested on the waves, was drawn up to the dear face above me ; it seemed to me as if I felt through an electric current the kiss which those lips pressed upon it. A feeling of indescribable bliss came over me. But when I looked up at that face again, it had disappeared ; instead, I saw it beside me near the bed ; but when I looked more closely it was no longer *his* face, but the sneering, grinning countenance of Ranzoff, and his hand held up the letter, that miserable, fatal letter which had destroyed the happiness of my life. I tried to seize it, I tried to shriek, but I could neither move nor utter a sound. I lay motionless in the midst of the murmuring waves. But all at once they leaped up high above me ; again I sank down, deeper and deeper, and all was black and dead around me.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

WAS it the bright sunshine which penetrated through the openings in the curtains, or the thrush which I had fed with crumbs now and then on my window-seat which awoke me out of my heavy sleep?

Weak and weary, as if from severe and unaccustomed exercise, I opened my tired eyes and looked around me.

It must be late already, for the rays of the morning sun were not shining in. Really, the clock on the mantel-piece was striking eleven. I had slept long; what day was it to-day?

Ah! it was all clear to me now. What day was it? The last, the decisive day—the day of my separation from *him*! Oh, how could I have slept away so many hours of this precious day! Where was he now?

My dream came back to me again—his dear face as I had seen it bending over me, then that distorted one by my bed. Ah! what was that? There, on the table, a white paper—a letter! I hastily took

it up. Actually—a letter from him ! With a trembling hand I tore open the envelope, and unfolded the letter :

“ ‘ We must separate ; my decision is irrevocable ! ’ you write me—why ? I am to guess at this. The day after our marriage, when you told me the same thing, I told you I was not good at guessing riddles. Now, after five weeks of hard, torturing study, I have found it out. The solution is very simple—you do not love me. You thought you did before our marriage, but it was a mistake—an unhappy, a fatal mistake. You learned it, unfortunately, too late—an hour after the wedding—and that is a misfortune for us both. I can find no other reason, for, Ella, since I have known you, I am unconscious of having wronged you in any way. What I may have done unconsciously before I knew you, you will pardon, as I will try to pardon you for the unspeakable pain which you have given me.

“ I had intended to tell you this by word of mouth ; perhaps we might have found some other solution of the difficulty. But you will not see me, will not speak to me, so I must believe that your decision is *really* irrevocable. Well, so be it. Farewell !

FEODOR.”

A wild cry of anguish was wrung from my lips, for my first thought was that he was gone and I should never see him again ! In an instant I had thrown on some clothes and rushed to the door of his room. It was ajar. I opened it and went in.

The room was empty. The same disorder as of yesterday—clothing, papers, and everything strewn about in confusion. Through the open window the

noonday sun shone in and gazed curiously on the chaos of things and on the unhappy woman who leaned against a chair to support herself.

Suddenly I started up. How was it, then—did I not bolt this door last night? How came it open now? How came the letter in my room?

I examined the door. The bolt was still there, but the place in the wall where the lock had been was broken. One pull of his strong hand—and I knew how strong it was—had destroyed the weak lock.

Then my dream had been real, after all. He had entered my room, had bent over me, had kissed my hair, had left the letter behind him. Oh, it was a farewell—there was no doubt of it—it was a farewell for life!

I hurriedly rang for Filippa. She came running in, quite excited.

"The holy Madonna be praised that Illustrissima is awake again!" she cried. "We were so anxious about her, we wanted to send for a doctor—there is one not far from here, a *Tedesco*—but the *padrone* said Illustrissima had slept badly, and was making up for it, and we were not to disturb her."

"The *padrone*—" I had only heard that one word—"has already had his breakfast, I suppose?"

"Oh, to be sure! He was up early, Wassili says—the silly fellow, he is just beginning to understand

me, although I always speak so clearly. Illustrissima understands every word. But, to be sure, she is a noble lady, and Wassili is a Russo, a barbarian ! ”

“ When did your master have his breakfast ? ” I interrupted her chatter, impatiently.

She looked at me rather timidly, with her pretty, dark eyes. Usually I was rather entertained by her chatter, and my perhaps rather rough interruption frightened her.

“ I don't know, exactly, what time it was, ” she said, rather abashed, “ but it was several hours ago. Of course, the *padrone* could not wait breakfast for Illustrissima, as he was going shooting. ”

Ah, he had gone shooting ! I breathed more freely. But was it really so ? Had he not made this a pretext ? But no ; there was his portmanteau, which he always took with him in the train, everything was strewn about his room—he could not be gone, he must be coming back again.

So he had gone shooting ! While I was wearing myself out with my torturing thoughts, he had gone to seek his pleasure. Well, why not ? A man who could marry a girl without loving her, only to win a wager, could also spend the day which decided the fate of both out hunting. So I must wait, perhaps till the evening, before I spoke to him—for the last time.

For I wished to speak to him, I *must* speak to him now, after his letter! It contained the first word that had been spoken with regard to his sin against me—through that I could get his confession. I could tell him that it was not, alas! want of love on *my* part that separated us, but only *his* guilt. “Since I have known you, I am unconscious of having wronged you in any way,” and, “What I may have done before I knew you—” these words were an acknowledgment! He had made the bet before he knew me, it was true, but he had won it after he had spent a week with me—had introduced me to his “friend” as his betrothed, just a week later, according to the conditions of the wager.

While these thoughts were whirling about in my head I suffered Filippa to dress me; then I sent her away to get my breakfast. As soon as I was alone, I got out the fatal letter from my jewel-case, where it had lain for so long, and put it in my pocket. It should make its own confession; my lips refused the office.

Wassili, who received me in the dining-room, told me that his master had gone out shooting “with Gregor Ivanovitch and some others,” and he begged that I would not wait dinner for him if he were not back by four o’clock.

Till four o’clock—what a long time! How could I fill up the hours? I could not sleep, and I could

not occupy myself, for my excitement made me restless. At length I determined to go out—perhaps I should be leaving Rome the next day, and I needed various things. I ordered Wassili to accompany me.

I found everything I needed in the Via Condotta, as well as a few pretty ornaments for Filippa. Perhaps she would go with me to England—ah, I should have to write to my old Tremlett ! But not until I had spoken to Feodor, and could give her the exact date of my arrival. My good old friend, how shocked she would be—especially when she heard—but no, that she should never do ! No one should ever know how cruelly I had been betrayed ; before there was time for our separation to create remark, I would find some opportunity to bring about the final act.

Tears of self-pity rose to my eyes, as, wrapped in such thoughts, I walked through the long, gay street, giving alms to every beggar, buying something from every pedler ; and while their words of gratitude and blessing followed me, and not a few glances of envy were cast upon the *signora* whose servant was so loaded with packages, I envied the little flower-girl who offered her bouquet of violets for a few centimes ; nay, I even envied the pale woman who, with her child on her arm, without a word, with a single gesture, claimed the compassion of the passers-by.

None of them were so comfortless, so unhappy, so forsaken as I !

But I could not bear to stay long away from the hotel. *He* might return ! I hurried back, but no—he had not yet returned, and it was only two o'clock ! I left Wassili at home, and went out again, alone.

Ever since I had been in Rome I had had a desire, which grew more intense every day, to go into a little church which was not far from our hotel. I had sometimes seen, through the half-open door, women kneeling there and praying. I wondered if it lightened their hearts ? I longed to find out for myself.

There are three sorts of trials. The first is that which comes to us direct from the hand of God—such as illness, or death. It may be the heaviest, but it is not the bitterest. One may be bent by it—crushed, even—but it does not make one hard, and the noble soul bows beneath it in humility.

Far more bitter is the trial which comes to us through men—treachery, slander, hatred. Beneath this one cannot bow, one rises up against it, resists it, and to the pain which the world inflicts upon us is added that other bitter pain, that we must learn to despise our fellow-men.

The bitterest, most gnawing, and most incurable grief is that which comes from our own fault. To

know that you have thrust yourself out of Paradise, that what you suffer is only the consequence of your own acts—that is the bitterest of all pain; and worse, even, than despising one's fellow-men, is it to despise one's self !

My trouble was made up of the last two kinds. He whom I had loved, and still loved, like nothing else on earth, had inflicted this grief upon me, and I myself had helped it on, through my blind passion for one man, through my scorn of the other, who had been used as the tool to bring about my disgrace. I had offended him, and he had revenged himself ; the other I had trusted blindly, and he had betrayed me. So I could find no comfort in myself ; I would try whether I could find it where so many had sought it.

The little church was empty. I knelt down in a little chapel where the sunlight came in, softened by the stained glass, and a Madonna looked down compassionately upon me, and prayed.

I did not pray for anything, not even for death, which was the only thing left me to wish for ; I had no words, no thoughts, only my hands were clasped, sighs escaped my breast, and tears streamed from my eyes. But when I rose from my knees my heart felt lighter, and I prayed to God that he would show me some other mode of release than by a self-inflicted death.

It was not far from four o'clock when I again entered the hotel. The Herr had not yet returned, the porter said, and the waiter asked if he should serve the dinner. I told him to wait half an hour longer, and went out on the balcony, from which there was a view of the Campagna on the east.

The early twilight of the short January day had already settled down upon the brown plain. I felt so in sympathy with this wilderness, desolate in her grief for her buried greatness; this gigantic monument of an extinct grandeur, of ruined happiness. A woman, rigid in the desolation that, crushing out all life, has spread itself over the broad plain, leaving only a few traces of her former beauty in her fallen, tearless countenance, shrouded in her dark mourning garments—so it seemed to me was the gloomy Campagna, resting at my feet in the pale rays of the sinking winter sun.

I stood for a long time among the sweet, fragrant orange-trees which adorned the balcony, and looked out into the distance to see if I could not discern the figure of a horseman, if a gay troop of hunters was not coming from that direction; but the shadows of the evening sank deeper and deeper, shrouding in darkness the great plain and its guardians—the jagged Sabine Mountains—and, disappointed, I turned back into the salon.

But even then I could not keep away from the window. I sat down in the niche on the little divan on which I had been sitting yesterday when he was talking to me. There, in the chair opposite me, he had sat, and close by, on the mosaic table, still stood the white camellia, blooming proudly as it had done yesterday. I don't know why I shuddered at the sight of it—the white, scentless blossoms seemed to me like flowers of death.

Then I heard a noise below in the hall of the hotel, different from the usual rattling of carriages, of footsteps coming and going.

Some one shrieked—other voices commanded quiet; in the midst there was a stamping of horses' feet, heavy steps on the stairs, and, suddenly, the door was flung open and Filippa, pale, with wide, terrified eyes, appeared on the threshold, wringing her hands.

In an instant I was standing erect before her. It was not my quivering lips, but my eyes, which asked the question, though even then there was no need. "O, Santa Madonna—il padrone!"

I thrust her hastily aside, and rushed out.

There—there was the answer to my question, plain and easy to understand, and yet not easy for me, for I stared at them as if I had seen a ghost, and would not believe my eyes. He, who only a few hours ago had stood before me strong and full

of life, now lay pale and rigid in the arms of his comrades, bleeding and lifeless.

A piercing shriek escaped my lips, my arms were stretched wildly out to him, then I sank down insensible.





CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN a woman, even the most delicate one, has a heavy burden laid upon her which she must bear for love's sake, she always finds the strength for it. The soul then triumphs over the body, over the refractory nerves. Mine, too, half-conscious that a great task was laid upon them, overcame their weakness and rose to the occasion.

My swoon could only have lasted a few minutes, for when I came to myself again they were still occupied in laying the wounded man on his bed under Wassili's direction. The by-standers gave way as, leaning on Filippa's arm, I went up to the bed and asked :

"What—how did it happen?" I had spoken in German, without being conscious of it. The gentlemen apparently did not understand me, for they looked at me shyly, and it was a long time—it seemed an age to me—before one of them stammered out in broken German something about

"Carelessness—gun went off—hope it isn't dangerous——"

It was Batutcheff—I knew him by his Russian accent. He had invited Feodor to this wretched shooting party. A feeling of horrible rage shook my whole frame.

"Who—whose gun went off?" I shrieked, wildly, in French. "Who did it?"

"Who? Good God, madame, he did it himself. Not intentionally, of course, but if Monsieur Batutcheff had not knocked his gun aside just at the right moment——"

It was one of the other gentlemen who spoke. I heard no more, asked no more—he himself, he himself! Those words sounded in my ears like a thunder-clap. Dumb with horror, I sank down on the bed.

I took his hand, his cold, white hand. I could feel its coldness against my burning lips. Then—had their glow power to call him back to life? I felt his hand tremble, I looked up—oh, God, thou wilt be merciful, thou wilt not crush thy poor child utterly! He opened his eyes, he looked at me!

That long, long look—I shall never forget it!

"*Slawa Bogu!*"* said Wassili's voice behind me. It sounded rough, as if hindered by a sob.

* "God be praised!"

"Here—here is the doctor!" cried Filippa, rushing in, "*il medico tedesco!*"

They all moved aside, I alone remained kneeling by the bed; it seemed to me as if it was his hand now which was holding mine.

The doctor came up on the other side of the bed and loosened the bandage which the gentlemen had hastily put on. The wound was in the left upper arm, and the bandages and the shirt were all soaked with blood. I shuddered, not at the blood, but because it was *his* blood, because he had to endure pain and, most of all, at the horrible thought that he himself—he himself——

"It is a flesh wound, pretty deep, but not dangerous," said the doctor, replying to my anxious, imploring glance. "It was only the loss of blood which brought on the swoon."

"No doubt," remarked the young Russian, "and the jolting of the transport——"

"The wound was made by a bullet, not by shot," continued the doctor. "What were the gentlemen hunting?"

"I hoped to meet a boar, and so I had loaded with ball."

It was Feodor's voice which spoke—low, extinguished—but did the most magnificent music ever sound sweeter to me? In the bliss of that moment I bent over his hand and kissed it.

It trembled beneath my touch, and as I looked up in confusion I saw a slight flush pass over his face.

"You must be quiet—quite quiet," remarked the doctor. "Madame will help me in putting on the bandage, perhaps. I suppose you learned that during the war?"

I cast down my eyes in shame. At that time I had been away on my travels, and I thought I paid my debt to my country sufficiently with money—oh, what a selfish creature I had been! But I did understand how to put on a bandage, nevertheless. I quickly brought everything that was necessary from my room and sewed the long strips together.

I felt Feodor's eyes following each one of my movements.

"It is strange one could be so awkward," he resumed. "I thought I heard a rustling—in the bushes behind the little temple, and aimed—but the thing went off too soon and so——"

The doctor nodded, as if satisfied; I looked searchingly at the other gentlemen, one after the other. They were standing in the window whispering, and I heard Batutcheff say, in a low tone: "Nonsense! Such a lucky fellow—as ever the sun shone on! But come, we must go."



CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER the torture I had endured for the last few weeks, the days that now followed were easy—nay, even sweet. He needed quiet and good nursing, the doctor said, then the slight injury would soon be healed, especially with such a magnificent constitution as the patient seemed to have. So to remain with him without anxiety, to be allowed to nurse him, to tell him without words that I understood him—that was sweet, that was almost happiness!

Yes, I had understood him! I had said we must separate—it was my irrevocable decision. He knew why: he felt his guilt, and he meant to wipe it out—with his blood, his life.

But fate had been satisfied with the expiation of his blood—his life was spared. Should I be harder to him than fate had been? No, I accepted the expiation—I pardoned him. For I was convinced of one thing, that he would not have proceeded to such extremities if the separation had not

been dreadful to him too, if he had not deeply repented the sin against me of which he had been guilty—in a word, if he had *not loved me*. Yes, I felt it, he loved me—now all might yet be well.

A fortnight had passed since the accident. I had scarcely left his room during that time. In the daytime I generally sat in the chair by his bed, and read to him, or I occupied myself with some work, one of those gay embroideries which leave so much to one's own taste, and he playfully gave his advice in the choice of the colors. Even at night I did not leave the care of him to any one else, though the faithful Wassili insisted on always being at hand. The door between our rooms was always open (I am afraid later comers found the broken lock in the same condition), and at his slightest movement I was beside his bed. What happiness it gave me to hand him the refreshing drink or to put his pillows straight, and to cool his burning forehead! And what a thrill passed over me at the grateful look in his eyes, or the soft kiss which he imprinted on my hand before he touched the glass! Ah, it was a time of great happiness and sweetness!

But it could not last. Soon he was allowed to get up, he could leave the sick-room, he could read again himself, could even write his own letters, while he carried his left arm in a sling. He needed me no longer. I had his writing-table brought into the

salon, and put into the flower-decked window. There he generally sat in the morning, after breakfast, looking into his papers ; or he wrote and read, and I, sitting in the other window, looked across at him to see if he would not speak to me about what he was reading or writing. But I did not venture to ask, and he—remained silent.

It was a holiday. The bells were ringing all about, and the square in front of the hotel was livelier than usual. The procession was to pass here—one of those magnificent trains of the Roman Catholic Church which charm the senses, and through them work upon the heart.

I stood at the window and looked down on the gay scene below, but my thoughts were not there. They were fixed on that writing-table, and my eyes followed my thoughts, and found it more interesting, instead of the brilliant spectacle outside, to observe how the February sun, breaking through the flowers in front of the window, cast its flickering lights on the white paper, how they glided over his beautifully shaped hand, and lingered on the ring—the smooth, gold band which adorned the fourth finger. And then a ray fell straight over his head, just over that refractory lock which was always falling over his forehead, and especially now that it had grown so long—and then wantonly crept down to the soft, curly beard, and played about the mouth——

"Will you be so good as to hold the letter while I seal it. One is so awkward with only one hand!"

It was a large, official-looking letter—perhaps the answer to that one he had consulted me about, relating to his call to St. Petersburg. I trembled as I laid one hand on the paper and held the seal in the other—the hammer and anvil, the arms of the Amstettens. If he did not refer again to our conversation, if he accepted my "irrevocable decision," if I had deceived myself in all my conclusions, and the freedom I had given him was welcome to him—what then?

"I was obliged to write to Berlin to give a report of myself"—he spoke without looking at me. "I had promised to enter upon my appointment in St. Petersburg on the first of March, new style, but now——"

"Now you are asking for delay, are you not?"

I dared not say more. Would he not continue, and mention our former conversation?

He looked at me gravely, searchingly. But he did not reply to my question.

"How pale you look, Ella," he remarked at length. "This close confinement in the sick-room is not good for you. You should go out for a drive. It is a long time since you went to your friend, Professor What's-his-name——"

There was that sharp, hard tone again ! It pierced me to the very soul. Was that old torture to begin again ? And how happened he to speak of this man now, whom I had quite forgotten, together with the painful scene in his studio, in the late exciting events ?

“ I had not thought about him,” I said, gently.

“ Really ? And yet you were so very angry that time because I took you away. It is true, I interrupted you—you were painting that little brown fellow, weren't you ? I remember, now, you brought your picture home with you—it was your drawing of him, wasn't it ? Or—had the professor been drawing you ? You were standing so close together, and he was looking at you so—attentively, when I went in, that I was doubtful who was the painter and who was the model——”

My rebellious blood ! To think that the strongest will in the world could not keep it down ! No, it would not be restrained ; it rushed to my cheeks, to my very brow, and made my ears throb almost to bursting, and forced me to cast down my burning eyes. But through the closed lids I could feel his eyes resting upon me ; nay, I could feel that the searching expression changed into a wrathful one——

“ You see, Ella, your blood is more truthful than your lips. It accuses you, while they are silent——”

His voice sounded harsh, as he gasped out these words in a low, suppressed tone.

I looked up in anger and amazement. Of what did my blood accuse me? About what were my lips silent? Only that I had drawn *his* picture instead of the little brown boy's. That I had made the discovery that I could draw nothing but him—always him! Because I saw only him before me always, thought only of him, because he filled my whole soul! Was that my crime? Oh, what an *Othello*!

Well, he should judge for himself! A fortnight ago I would have died before I would have shown him that sketch; now, since he had tried to expiate his sin against me with his blood, since I had forgiven him entirely, now I would show him how unjust he had been!

I put my hand into my pocket. It was the same brown velvet dress that I had worn that day. I wore it now—I was so vain!—because the painter had said it was becoming to me. I had put the crushed-up sketch into the pocket then—it must be there still. My hand grasped the folded paper and drew it out, but with a low cry I put it back in my pocket. That was not the sketch—it was the fatal letter which I had taken out of its hiding-place that morning! And—I remembered it now—I had put the sketch in its place.

Feodor had followed all my movements attentively.

"Ella," he said, and his voice sounded hoarse, "you have nursed me during the past fortnight like a woman who—loved her husband. I know very well that it was only compassion—a feeling, by the way, for which I am grateful to no one—and now, too, you wish to spare me—it is very kind of you, but I am no longer ill, and I do not need the twilight any more ; on the contrary, it is only torture to me. It must be clear as day between us, even at the risk of putting an end—no, do not misunderstand me, I shall not try to solve the problem a second time by a bullet, since that officious Batutcheff interfered with the first attempt. Really, it was not a friendly act——"

"Feodor !"

"You need not look so horror-stricken, child ; I am telling you nothing new. I knew you understood when they brought me in. It was all very natural ; who could be surprised that life was a burden to me ? Certainly not you. And then, what other way out of it was there ? I was to take up my diplomatic career again ; I had desired it, and my wishes were met in the kindest manner. But *how* should I begin it ? My first attempt at a diplomatic career had been interrupted in a very undiplomatic manner by my own folly ; you know

the affair with the Countess Pappendorf. There was less of love in that affair than of youthful idiocy—and then the folly of the husband in challenging a boy of twenty! However, the consequence was that I was obliged to send in my resignation.”

I listened, breathless.

“Now, since I have become a Prussian subject,” continued Feodor, “I wished to enter upon my career again. I encountered no difficulties, but am I to signalize my reëntrance into diplomacy by a separation from my wife—my wife, who was married to me only two months ago? That would be impossible. And yet we must separate—your decision was irrevocable. I could not now decline the post which I had asked for myself; and, besides, life had no more charms for me, and to you—I was only a hinderance——”

Unable to utter a word, I buried my face in my hands. Oh, God, what a mercy that this guilt was not laid upon my soul!

Feodor saw my deep emotion, and he evidently felt compassion for me, for he continued, more gently:

“Besides, I had taken care that no one, not even you, should suspect it, if my attempt had been successful. An accident, such as often happens in hunting—nothing more! The letter of acceptance which I had sent off to Berlin proved that. It was

all very well thought out, well planned ; it is a pity that it did not succeed."

"A pity !" I sprang up. I was going to read him a lecture on the immorality of his ideas, but it occurred to me that I had had the same intention ; no, it did not become me to reproach him !

He leaned his head on his right hand, and looked at me steadily.

"Strange !" he murmured. "Just so, with that shy, timid glance she stood before me on that first evening when I burnt my hand with the curtain, and when I looked into her eyes I knew that I loved this woman and that she would love me. This delusion lasted till the wedding-day, then only to be cruelly destroyed. Tell me, Ella, why did you marry me ?"

"Because I loved you."

I said the words as firmly and as solemnly as I had lately uttered my yes at the altar.

He shook his head.

"The imperfect is a sad tense in the verb 'to love.' But, at least, be kind enough to tell me in what way I have lost your love—if I ever possessed it. I do not know."

Ah, now the moment had come—now I must speak ! And his own words in his own letter pointed out the way. My fingers convulsively clasped that paper in my pocket.

"Feodor"—I tried in vain to keep my voice from trembling—"you know, you *must* know, what has come between us. It is nothing new, it is nothing but your own fault. You are surprised? And yet you are quite conscious of this fault. You confessed in your letter, when you said: 'In what I sinned against you before I knew you——' "

He sprang up from his chair, and laid his right hand heavily on the table.

At this moment the sound of chanting came in from the street—the procession was passing. The interruption was welcome to us, we were both silent; perhaps with a feeling of putting off, a little, the decisive word which must be uttered the next minute——

"My fault!" repeated Feodor, at length. "'In so far as I sinned against you before I knew you'—so you have been raking up my past, have you? And all because you loved me?"—he laughed bitterly. "Well, it has not been worse than that of other young men, though I am very far from immaculate. I never pretended to have been so, either, not even to you, and if I had attempted it, there would have been plenty to undeceive you. That infamous copy of verses—a beautiful production of Ranzoff's——"

Ranzoff—ah! There, he had spoken that name at last! I felt my face flush crimson.

"Ranzoff!" I repeated the name, slowly. "Yes, it was a delightful production. But he has sinned far more against me—and you with him——"

He colored. At last—at last he understood to what I referred. He looked darkly at me, as if, instead of the victim, he had his accomplice the traitor before him. "Ranzoff," he murmured; "can he have been so base as to tell you what he promised to keep secret—that silly farce, of which the first act was not played through to the end——"

"A farce—for you!" The remembrance brought back all my bitterness. "But for me, it was a tragedy."

He struck his clenched fist on the table. (Oh, his right hand had not lost any of its strength!) "Let us have done with these riddles!" he cried, impatiently. "What do you know, what did this Ranzoff tell you?"

"*Your wager!*"

The words escaped me before I thought, but, now that they were out, I breathed a sigh of relief, as if a heavy burden had been lifted from me, and, supporting myself on the arm of my chair, I repeated, reproachfully: "Yes, your wager! Do you understand now?"

He understood—I saw it in his darkly frowning brows, in his angry glance.

"The scoundrel!" he hissed out, between his

clenched teeth. "And what did the fellow tell you?"

I could not say it, for my life I could not bring my lips to utter the accusation. I threw the letter on the table, and, covering my face, I sank down into my chair. I could not even bear to see him reading what was so disgraceful to him.

The time seemed an age to me. Not a word, not an exclamation interrupted the anxious silence; only his breath seemed to come heavily from his breast and escaped his closed lips like a groan.

I listened anxiously. What if this excitement should injure him, when he had scarcely recovered! My hands dropped from my face——

He sat leaning back in his chair. Every drop of blood had left his face. His eyes gazed at me sadly, darkly, but no longer reproachfully.

"And you could believe that of me!" he murmured, at length.

I sprang up. What? It was not true? I had wronged him? Oh, how gladly I would be convinced of that—how gladly I would beg his forgiveness! But how could it be possible? Did not every circumstance confirm what was written there?

"And you could believe that of me?" he repeated, slowly. "But, to be sure, I am not entirely free from blame, and he, the scoundrel, had skillfully twisted everything so as to make a crime of

what was really a momentary impulse. Oh, now I understand it all! You found this letter in your dressing-room after our marriage; he imposed silence upon you, since he knew I was bound by our mutual agreement—really, it was very cleverly planned. He has some knowledge of human nature, the scoundrel; he knew that neither of us would break our word, as he had done; we had to wring out an allusion to the matter first——”

I nodded. “Yes, but in your letter—your half-confession——” I murmured.

“Confession!” The color came back to his cheeks, and his eyes flashed. “Well, listen now to the true version of this infamous story.

“The first part is correct enough—the gay company, in which the wine circulated more freely than was good for some of us. After the gentlemen had departed Ranzoff stayed behind, as he says, in order to speak to me about his collection of coins. Ah, how he has made use of that evidence! He ought to have been a lawyer, a rascally lawyer—then he wouldn’t always be so hard up, the scoundrel! He had offered me the thing, but he demanded an exorbitant price for it, which I refused to pay. I could not endure the man from the beginning, on account of his half-servile, half-impertinent manner——”

“Yes, servile and impertinent!” I interposed; “and yet you associated with him——”

"And yet you permitted him to call you his friend," he rejoined. "You see, there is where we were both to blame. But let me go on."

Feodor had put his free hand down on the table; the sun played, as before, with the gold band on the fourth finger; from a distance came the chant of the procession.

"I told Ranzoff again," he continued, "that I would not think of buying the collection. He dropped the subject, and, with apparent indifference, passed to another, which we had already discussed, the so-called luck in love affairs. I let him talk, and smoked my cigar without even listening to him.

"Then he told me about you—that is, without mentioning your name, he told me of a haughty coquette, as he called her, who rejected all suitors—a sort of Donna Diana, who took pleasure in luring men on by her cleverness and then laughing them to scorn, and he challenged me to revenge our sex against her."

"A worthy deed for a man!"

"You are right—I ought to have told him so, but—and here is the only point in which I am to blame—I did not do it. He put the whole affair as a jest, I took it up in the same spirit, and—entered into it."

"Then you did! And yet you reproach me for believing that of you!"

"Have patience—I have not nearly finished yet."

(The patience which he demanded of me certainly was not to be perceived in his tone.) "Yes, I took the bet which he proposed. That was, I repeat it, a great fault—a very great fault, not against you, but against the whole sex, for your name had not been mentioned—and when at length it was mentioned it made no difference to me, for I, having only been in the city a few weeks, had never heard of it."

"And the prize of the wager"—my bitterness got the upper hand—"the prize was a collection of coins and, *par dessus le marché*, my hand!"

"Be silent! Who dares speak so of my wife!"

How angrily his eyes flashed—I should not like to have been a man just then!

"Try to listen to me quietly," he said, then, more calmly himself. "And listen, above all, to an avowal which increases my crime against your sex, but diminishes it as far as you are concerned. The conditions of that miserable bet were, it is true, that if in a week after my first meeting with you I could introduce you to Ranzoff as my *fiancée*, I should win——"

"The collection of coins—oh, what an infamy!"

"I do not deny it. If I did not succeed I was to buy the thing, and give twice as much as he had asked for it."

I drew myself up, all my outraged dignity was again aroused.

"And you call yourself blameless!" I groaned.

"Not blameless, Ella! And now, when I have to relate the miserable story, it seems more disgraceful than ever—and what I said to him laughingly will sound even more shameful to you; that I need only present this Donna Diana to *him* as my *fiancée*, for he certainly could not imagine that I would marry a stranger of whom, from his description, I could have anything but a high opinion, for the sake of winning a bet."

I hid my face, which burned with shame and anger, in the cushion of my chair. It was too horrible, too humiliating!

Then I felt my hand clasped, felt his breath on it, and his voice, quite close to my ear, said in a soft, winning tone whose power I knew only too well: "Yes, only so can I confess—at your feet. Perhaps so, I may receive forgiveness."

But I felt no inclination toward forgiveness—I could not see as yet how he was less to blame than I had believed. I felt nothing but my humbled pride, my outraged womanly dignity.

"An engagement for sport!" I murmured. "For a day, for an hour, only for a jest, to humiliate a stranger who had done you no harm! And I am to forgive this!"

"No; if I had done this I could make no claim to forgiveness"—he held my hand tight, in spite of

my resistance. "It can only prove to you that I had no idea, naturally, of marrying a woman whom I did not love. And when the impossible jest became serious, when, in a short time, I presented you not only to that man, but to the whole world, as my betrothed, when you became my wife—all this could only take place *because I loved you!*"

Oh, what an imploring and yet ardent look he cast upon me from his lowly position! It was hard to resist it.

Then he went on to relate how he had already repented of his bet the next morning, and went to Ranzoff to get him to release him. But the latter had laughed at him, and promised to get him an invitation for the next reception of the lady. He, Feodor, was curious to see what I was like. He had called, but without finding me, and thus he was introduced to me on that evening by Ranzoff.

"Yes, just a week before the engagement, as the conditions of the wager prescribed," I murmured.

He put his hand on my lips. "Don't speak; only listen to me. Then I saw you—I learned to know you. The circumstances of that eventful evening are no doubt still clear in your memory, as they are in mine; but what you do not know, what you cannot know, is the impression you made upon me."

I listened intently. Now, at this moment, he could not utter compliments or any mere phrases.

I should hear the plain truth. What impression had the ugly little girl made upon him ?

"I can hardly tell you," he continued, gently, "what various emotions swayed me that evening. I felt such a miserable wretch in the face of your candid welcome, your confiding frankness, that I cursed myself and Ranzoff and that infamous bet a thousand times, and I felt a sort of satisfaction in the pain of the burns, as if it were a punishment for my crime. Nay, I would joyfully have endured far more if I could have blotted out the past. That, of course, I could not do. But the miserable farce should not be carried any further ; that I was determined. So, as soon as I got Ranzoff alone—you know he went home with me——"

I only nodded. My suspense would not permit me to utter a word.

"Perhaps you even heard his loud-spoken words : 'Well, you are in luck !' I interrupted him at once with the declaration that I would not have anything more to do with that hateful bet, which I declared lost on my part. To reproach him for having described you to me so falsely, as——"

"As proud and cold——"

"Yes, and as coquettish and arrogant and all manner of things, and that he should dare to compromise you, *you* in such a manner—for that I felt myself too guilty, and he was too far beneath me.

"I paid Ranzoff," continued Feodor, "that very evening, what I owed him for the bet. I declined the collection, which was now hateful to me, but he insisted upon fulfilling the letter of the agreement. So it came into my hands, later to serve against me as damning proof. Of course, we pledged ourselves to observe the strictest silence with regard to the whole affair—the base plot, as I then called it. You know how he kept his word."

"And you, Feodor, though you recognized the baseness of the plot, yet you carried it through to the end—a week later, exactly a week——"

My resentment overpowered me so that I thrust him away roughly, as he still knelt beside me.

He started. I was shocked. Had I hurt his injured arm? "Please, get up," I murmured; "I cannot bear it."

He rose at once.

"Ella, a man only humbles himself thus when he hopes for pardon. If you do not forgive me, by God——"

He leaned over my chair. There was pride, something almost threatening, in his bearing. And I—I had told him I would rather look up to him than down upon him.

"Yes, a week later," he began again; "that was fate, not my will. I loved you, Ella, loved you from that very first evening I met you, when you seemed

to me so true, so natural, so frank, in the midst of the hypocritical, artificial society about you. I loved you, and had an ardent desire to win you, but I waited for that fatal period to be over before I would speak the word that trembled on my lips, before I would ask the question, the answer to which I thought—pardon me—I could read in your sweet eyes !”

I turned away, blushing deeply. No, I had not concealed it from him, my passionate love ! How could I, since it permeated my entire being, since it was a part of myself ?

“ Then on that Wednesday—do you remember ? —I was refused admittance. Why ? No one knew. Was the gracious Fräulein ill ? No, but she did not receive. I had to go away without having seen you. What had happened ? Had some one slandered me to you ? I knew it would not be difficult ; as I have already told you, I have not been immaculate—how easily could suspicion be thrown upon me ! I felt I must speak to you at any price ; but the next day there was the same denial ! And the fellow said to me, at the same time, that the gracious Fräulein was painting ! She painted, and refused to see me ! Was it really true, what others, besides Ranzoff, had told me, that she was capricious ? I must know. How I forced my way in to you, you already know. But the very first glance at you was sufficient to

show me that, whatever had happened, your feeling for me—forgive me, if I imagined it—was not chilled. I thought no more about my resolution. I did not think of anything. I only followed the impulse of my passion, my love, and—you engaged yourself to me. It was not until you reminded me that that was the evening of your reception, that it occurred to me how exactly I had fulfilled the conditions of that hateful bet. I would gladly have put off the announcement of our engagement, but what reason could I give for it? You were half-offended at the first word I uttered to that effect. So I gave it up. Besides, it was all over—that fatal agreement; no one would ever know, and I would not think any more about it.”

“So that anonymous letter was really the cause of our engagement on that fatal day?” I inquired, drawing a long breath.

“Yes, it was the indirect cause. Ranzoff wanted to frighten you out of it, and he only hastened the *dénouement*. That, too, the hypocrite turned to his advantage in the cleverest manner. For, of course, that delightful production came from him in connection with Signora Minelli. I recognized her handwriting. The lady could not pardon me for throwing her no more flowers. For, Ella, she has never received anything from me except the flowers and a few ornaments.”

"Really? And I was so jealous of her!"

He nodded, thoughtfully.

"Yes, how I rejoiced in that jealousy at that time, as a proof of your love——"

"Which you had read in my eyes that very first evening, you wretch!"

"I thought so, at least. I believed it till our wedding-day. But what could I think after that? I was forced to believe your love had died out, or that—yes, I will acknowledge, Ella, your eyes sometimes seemed to belie your lips; but I could no longer understand you—I doubted, I tortured myself day and night with all possible and impossible solutions, till your letter convinced me that your love was really dead—that it had been a passing caprice, dying out as quickly as it had arisen——"

"Feodor, now it is my turn to ask you—you could believe that of me?"

"I was *forced* to believe it. For never once did the thought occur to me that that man, who was separated from you by the ocean, could turn traitor and slanderer. I did not consider even him capable of such baseness. One is always making the mistake of judging others by one's self. But, to be sure, one ought not to associate with men who are on so much lower a level; we have received a bitter punishment for having done this. But still, Ella, I cannot yet understand how you could believe I had

betrayed you so horribly, that my love—such love !—was only pretended ! Ella, Ella, how could it be possible ? ”

He stood before me with his head thrown back, with his ardent eyes fixed on me. My head drooped. Oh, yes, how had it been possible ? How could I fail to recognize that love which was always breaking out even through his anger ? Yet it was only because—“Because I had always believed—because I was convinced, that an—ugly woman could never find any one to love her ! ”

There, it was out now—the secret of my life ! It had escaped my lips, low and timidly. I dared not look up at him, and yet I saw how the expression of his face changed, how his eyes lighted up, and something like a smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

Then he knelt down again by my side, and, taking my chin in his right hand, he gently raised my drooping head.

“Oh, indeed, so we are ugly, are we ? ” he said, in a tone which I had not heard since the days of our engagement, a tone of mingled mockery and tenderness, but with a larger proportion of the latter than of the former. “That is why we wouldn’t marry, that is why we were so willing to distrust our eyes and ears and heart, and believe in a monstrosity. We are ugly, are we ? Let me see ! ” And he



"OH, INDEED, SO WE ARE UGLY, ARE WE?"

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looked me in the face, as grave as a judge, while I tried in vain to hide my most inconvenient blushes.

"Yes, yes, what did your old Commerzienrätthin say? We are certainly not a *beautesse* after either the Greek or the Roman style—but ugly—with eyes like those—that no one will believe. It was the eyes I fell in love with first, and the rest, you see, were thrown in."

Oh, how I loved my eyes for that—my mother's eyes! "Besides, don't you know, Ella," he continued, "that it is by no means the great beauties who are loved the most! I have seen them all and admired them—my pale, elegant countrywomen; the naïve, blond Germans; the languishing and yet self-conscious Englishwomen; the piquante, graceful Frenchwomen; the ardent Spaniards and Italians; nay, even the voluptuous Orientals—but never, do you hear? Ella, never did one of these beauties inspire me with a feeling that could compare in the remotest degree with what I feel for you. For in you, Ella, I found more than beauty—I found grace united to womanly dignity. I found intellect and naturalness, I found pride and humility; in short, I found a true woman and a genuine character. For these soft, helpless creatures cannot hold a true man long enchained. What is the value of a victory gained over a broken reed? But to mould a character already formed, on our

own ; to bend a strong will to ours—that is, indeed, something worth while ! You are holding up your finger—that sounds tyrannical, does it not ? Well, I should not say that to a weak woman, and—a weak woman would never rule me as you do, Ella.”

I rule him ? I not a weak woman ? Oh, what else was I ? I who, though I had thought him guilty and unworthy, had yet not ceased for one moment to love him. I who, now infolded in his arms, leaned against him and felt that I must sink down, that I must die of bliss if robbed of his support—I no weak woman ?

“ And do you know what more I found in you ? ” his lips whispered, close to my ear. “ I found love, ardent, passionate love, such as I longed for, such as I felt myself—the love which is now shining in your clear eyes. Oh, let me kiss them, those compassionate eyes that have so often comforted me ; that have so often given me hope when the stern lips refused me a single smile, a single kind word. May I believe, Ella, that they keep *this* look for me alone—for no one, no one else, not even for the painter who wants to perpetuate it on canvas——”

Now it was my turn to tease him. Smiling gayly, with my head on his shoulder, I looked up at him.

“ Poor Bardo ! you were horrid to him, you must go and beg his pardon—and poor Cecchino, too—his picture will never be finished——”

"Do you care?"

"Well—" I found it hard to look at him now—"I had taken such pains with the drawing—and I don't think it was bad——"

"I know you carried it home very carefully."

"Of course—as a souvenir of the pretty brown boy, and—of the most outrageous insult I ever received from any one—yes, yes, you tyrant, you—but you shall see the picture you were so jealous of."

I flew, rather than walked, to my room, and came back with the paper, which I had carefully smoothed out. Turning my head away, I gave him the sketch—hesitatingly and reluctantly, as a girl says, "I love you," for the first time.

"But, Ella, this—this isn't the boy—this is—how is this possible, my love?"

He drew me toward him—he held me clasped with his right arm.

"How was it possible? How would it be possible for me to paint another portrait, when there is only *one* man in the world for me?" my lips whispered, as soon as they were at liberty.

